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SPINOZA: REASON, RELIGION, POLITICS

edited by

Daniel GARBER

Mogens LÆRKE

Pierre-François MOREAU

Pina TOTARO

The relation between the *Ethics* & the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations of Spinoza Texts

ADN	Annotations to the *TTP*
C	Spinoza, *Collected Works*, E. M. Curley (ed. and trans.), 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986–2016). References are given by volume and page.
CM	*Cogitata metaphysica*
DPP	*Renati des Cartes Principia philosophiae*
E	*Ethics*
Ep	*Epistolae*
G	*Spinoza Opera*, Carl Gebhardt (ed.), 4 vols (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925).
KV	*Korte Verhandeling…*
NS	*Nagelate Schriften*
O	Spinoza, *Oeuvres*, Pierre-François Moreau (ed.) (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999–).
OP	*Opera posthuma*
TIE	*Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*
TP	*Tractatus politicus*
TTP	*Tractatus theologico-politicus*

Passages in Spinoza's *Ethics* are referred to using the following abbreviations: a (axiom); app (appendix); c (corollary); d (demonstration); def (definition); ex (explanation); l (lemma); p (proposition); pref (preface); s (scholium). The five parts of the *Ethics* are designated by Arabic numerals. Thus "E2p13s" designates *Ethics* Part 2, proposition 13, scholium. For the series of axioms, lemmata, etc. inserted between E2p13s and E2p14, please follow the conventions that Curley introduces in C I 458–62.

References to the *DPP* are given in the same style as the *Ethics*.

Abbreviations for Descartes's Writings

AT	Descartes, *Œuvres de Descartes*, C. Adam and P. Tannery (eds), 11 vols (Paris: Vrin, 1996).
CSMK	Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (trans.), 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984–91).

Preface

Almost all of the chapters in this collection were originally given at a conference on 5–7 May 2017 at Princeton University, a conference that also served to celebrate the publication of Volume 2 of Edwin Curley's *Collected Works of Spinoza*. It was a wonderful few days of discussion and celebration, but it was only the beginning of the process that led to this volume. We would like to thank all the contributors for their cooperation and especially for their patience as this volume came together and grew from an excellent conference to this final state.

The editors would also like to thank João Marques Carvalho, who greatly assisted in getting the manuscript prepared for final submission, as well as all of the very professional staff at Oxford University Press who worked with us on producing this volume. We would like especially to thank the legendary Peter Momtchiloff, our editor at Oxford University Press, who was encouraging and supportive over the years that it took to complete the project, one of the last he guided through to publication before retiring. We are very grateful that we had the opportunity to work with him.

List of Contributors

Edwin Curley is a Professor Emeritus at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, where he taught for seventeen years. Previously he had taught at the University of Illinois Chicago, Northwestern University, and San Jose State College. From 1966 until 1977 he held research positions at the Australian National University, where he wrote *Spinoza's Metaphysics* (1969) and *Descartes against the Skeptics* (1978), and began his translation of Spinoza's *Collected Works* (Vol. I, 1985; Vol. II, 2016).

Daniel Garber is the A. Watson Armour III University Professor of Philosophy, Department of Philosophy at Princeton University, where he has taught since 2002. He is the author of *Descartes' Metaphysical Physics* (1992) and *Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad* (OUP, 2009), among other books and edited collections, as well as numerous articles on a wide variety of topics in the history of philosophy and science in the early modern period.

Jonathan Israel is Professor Emeritus at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, and has published extensively on early modern Dutch history and culture and on the Enlightenment. His full-length biography of Spinoza, entitled *Spinoza, Life and Legacy*, was published by the Oxford University Press in 2023.

Julie R. Klein is Professor of Philosophy at Villanova University. In addition to early modern philosophy, her interests include medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophy, critical theory, and queer theory. She is completing a book manuscript entitled *Spinozan Pedagogy*.

Mogens Lærke is Senior Researcher at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), affiliated at the Maison Française d'Oxford and at the research centre IHRIM at the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon. He is the author of *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza* (2008), *Les Lumières de Leibniz: controverses avec Huet, Bayle, Regis et More* (2015), *Spinoza and the Freedom of Philosophizing* (OUP, 2021), as well as numerous edited and co-edited volumes and articles.

Russ Leo is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at Princeton University. He is the author of *Tragedy as Philosophy in Reformation Europe* (OUP, 2019).

Yitzhak Y. Melamed is the Charlotte Bloomberg Professor of Philosophy at Johns Hopkins University. He works on Early Modern Philosophy, German Idealism, Medieval Philosophy, and some issues in contemporary metaphysics, and is the author of *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought* (OUP, 2013), and *Spinoza's Labyrinths* (OUP, forthcoming). Currently, he is working on the completion of a book on Spinoza and German Idealism, and on an introduction to Spinoza's philosophy.

Pierre-François Moreau is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon. He has written about Lucretius, Hobbes, Spinoza, and about French

philosophy in the nineteenth century. He is the director of the journal *La Lettre clandestine*, dedicated to clandestine manuscripts and to libertine, heterodox, and materialist authors. He is the author of *Spinoza: l'expérience et l'éternité* (1994), *Lucrèce: l'âme* (2002) and as numerous other books and articles. Moreau is the editor of Spinoza, *Œuvres*, a new scholarly edition of Spinoza's writings currently in progress from Presses Universitaires de France.

Steven Nadler is Vilas Research Professor and William H. Hay II Professor of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is the author of *Spinoza: A Life* (2nd edn, 2018), and numerous other books and articles. His most recent books include *Think Least of Death: Spinoza on How to Live and How to Die* (2020) and *The Good Cartesian: Louis de La Forge and the Rise of a Philosophical Paradigm* (OUP, 2024).

Kristin Primus is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley. She is currently co-editing (with Andrea Sangiacomo) the *Journal of Spinoza Studies* and working on a book manuscript entitled *Transforming Philosophy: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics*.

Ursula Renz is Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the History of Philosophy section at the University of Graz. She specializes in early modern philosophy, Kant, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German philosophy and has interests in epistemology, metaphysics, and moral psychology. Her publications include three monographs *Die Rationalität der Kultur. Kulturphilosophie und ihre transzendentale Begründung bei Cohen, Natorp und Cassirer* (2002), *The Explainability of Experience. Realism and Subjectivity in Spinoza's Theory of the Human Mind* (OUP, 2017; original German version, 2010), *Was denn bitte ist kulturelle Identität? Eine Orientierung in Zeiten des Populismus* (2019), and several edited books among which are *Handbuch Klassische Emotionstheorien* (2012) and *Self-Knowledge. A History* (OUP, 2017).

Michael A. Rosenthal holds the Grafstein Chair in Jewish Philosophy at the University of Toronto. He is the co-editor with Yitzhak Melamed of *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide* (2010), the editor of the forthcoming volume on *Spinoza and Modern Jewish Philosophy*, and the author of articles on early modern, Jewish, and German philosophy. He is currently working on a book on Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus*.

Donald Rutherford is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of California, San Diego. He is the author of *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature* (1995), as well as many articles on a wide range of figures and topics in early modern philosophy and the reception of ancient philosophy in the period. With Brandon Look, he is the editor and translator of *The Leibniz-Des Bosses Correspondence* (2007).

Andrea Sangiacomo is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Groningen and Professor by special appointment at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, where he holds the chair 'The Actuality of Spinoza'. He is the author of *Spinoza on Reason, Passions, and the Supreme Good* (OUP, 2019).

Emanuela Scribano is Professor Emerita of History of Philosophy at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. She is a member of Academia dei Lincei and an international honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Her main research interest is early modern

philosophy. Among her books are: *L'existence de Dieu. Histoire de la preuve ontologique de Descartes à Kant* (2002); *Macchine con la mente. Fisiologia e metafisica tra Cartesio e Spinoza* (2015); *Anges et bienheureux. La connaissance de l'infini de Thomas d'Aquin à Spinoza* (2021); *Descartes in Context. Essays* (OUP, 2023).

Piet Steenbakkers is Researcher in the History of Philosophy at Utrecht University. Until his retirement in 2016, he held the chair of Spinoza Studies at Erasmus University Rotterdam, and was lecturer in the history of modern philosophy at Utrecht University. With Fokke Akkerman and Pierre-François Moreau, Steenbakkers published the critical edition of Spinoza's *Ethica* (Vol. IV in the series *Spinoza Œuvres*, 2022).

Pina Totaro is Senior Researcher at the Istituto per il Lessico Intellettuale Europeo e Storia delle Idee (ILIESI) of the Italian Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (CNR), in Rome. Her scholarly interests are in the history of philosophy, the philosophical and cultural terminology, and the history of science and ideas. She has written on the history of Spinozism, on women philosophers and scientists between ancient and contemporary times. She is on the Editorial Advisory Board of a number of international journals. She is the editor and translator into Italian of Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (2007) and the co-editor with L. Spruit of *The Vatican Manuscript of Spinoza's* Ethics (2011). She is the author of '*Instrumenta mentis*'. *Contributi al lessico filosofico di Spinoza* (2009); *Quatre enquêtes sur Spinoza* (2020); and the editor or co-editor of numerous collected volumes, including *Donne, filosofia e cultura nel Seicento* (1999); *Il sogno tra tarda antichità e età moderna*, (with C. Buccolini) (2020); *The Philosophers and the Bible*, (with A. Schino and A. Del Prete) (2022); and *Letture di Spinoza per il nuovo millennio* (with G. Licata) (2023).

Theo Verbeek is Emeritus Professor in the History of Modern Philosophy at Utrecht University. He has published on Descartes, Dutch Cartesianism, Spinoza, and La Mettrie. With Erik-Jan Bos and Roger Ariew he is now working on a critical edition of Descartes's correspondence. He is a member of the Royal Dutch Academy and *doctor honoris causa* of the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon (2010).

Philip Waldner was a PhD Researcher at the universities of Klagenfurt and Graz; from 2018 to 2019, he was visiting graduate student at Yale university. In 2022, he graduated with a dissertation about the role of language for Spinoza's political philosophy. He is currently working as a journalist in Vienna.

Introduction

Daniel Garber

Spinoza's *Ethics* and his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* are, on the face of it, radically different works. The one is written in Euclidean form, with definitions, axioms, and propositions, while the other is written in chapters. The one is austere and abstract and virtually without reference to other people or other thinkers, while the other is filled with biblical exegesis and history and with discussions of philosophers, theologians, and prophets. While the *TTP* claims to be addressed to the "philosophical reader," the presumed audience of the *Ethics*, it would seem much more of relevance to the theologian and even the common person than to the philosopher. Furthermore, as some of the chapters in this volume will discuss, there are real tensions and even contradictions, real and apparent, between what the one book teaches and what the other does. Yet there is a way in which the same voice animates both works, the same intellectual curiosity and bold imagination. The chapters in this collection explore the complex relations between these two contrasting works by the same author.

The volume is divided into six parts. Part I, "Two Intertwined Texts," begins with a chapter by Piet Steenbakkers, "Parallel Masterpieces: Intertextuality in Spinoza's *Ethics* and *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*." Steenbakkers starts the volume with a discussion of the composition of both of Spinoza's texts, emphasizing the way in which their composition overlaps one another. The *Ethics* was started in late 1662 or early 1663, but set aside between the summer of 1665 and the end of 1669, while Spinoza composed the *TTP*. At that point, he returned to the *Ethics*, which was finished by May 1675. Though the works have radically different styles and organization, and are addressed to rather different audiences, Steenbakkers argues that the two works are thematically interconnected and ultimately advance the same larger program: bringing people of different sorts and temperaments to a collective liberation through reason, revelation, and politics. Though distinctly different projects, they are nevertheless expressions of the same philosophical spirit.

Steenbakkers's chapter is nicely complemented by Pina Totaro's contribution, "Continuity and Discontinuity between the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and the *Ethics*." Her chapter explores the relationship between the *TTP* and the *Ethics* by appealing to the dialectic between "letter" and "spirit." On Totaro's reading, Spinoza's biblical exegesis adopts the "*sola scriptura*" principle (adherence to the "letter") to show how, behind the different narratives offered in the biblical texts,

the ethical meaning (or "spirit" of the text) remains unchanged. This same "spirit" which Spinoza finds in Scripture, the product of a secularized reading of the text, is also evident in the *Ethics*, where it is presented as a consequence of a philosophical and political reflection on common human salvation and beatitude.

This part of the book ends with a chapter by Steven Nadler, "Spinoza's *Ethics* as a Theological-Political Treatise." Nadler begins with the religious and political context of the Dutch Republic of Spinoza's day. After showing how the *TTP* fits into that historical context, and directly addresses the way in which religion penetrates into the public sphere, he goes on to show how the *Ethics* can be seen to address many of the same issues about religion and politics so prominently displayed in the *TTP*. In this way, Nadler argues that the *Ethics* is, in a way, a theological-political treatise in its own right, despite its obvious differences from the *TTP*.

In Part II of the book, we turn to "God and Atheism." Mogens Lærke's chapter, "Prejudices, Common Notions, Intuitions: Knowledge of God between the *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," confronts an apparent inconsistency between what Spinoza says about God within the *Ethics*, and between the *Ethics* and the *TTP*. In E2p47, Spinoza writes that "the human mind has adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence." However, in E2p47s, Spinoza claims that "men do not have so clear a knowledge of God as they do of the common notions." Moreover, in the *TTP*, Spinoza writes that "knowledge of God must be drawn from common notions certain and known through themselves" [*TTP* 6 (G III 61/C II 130)]. Lærke attempts to resolve the apparent contradictions among these competing assertions. Lærke's chapter is followed by Yitzhak Melamed's examination of one of the most common complaints among readers of both the *Ethics* and the *TTP*: that Spinoza is an atheist. In his chapter, "Spinoza's 'Atheism', the *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," Melamed examines this question carefully, and arrives at what will certainly be a surprising conclusion for many. After an extended discussion of what various readers meant when they called Spinoza an atheist and the various grounds on which such judgments rested, Melamed works carefully through the *Ethics* and the *TTP* to argue that properly interpreted, Spinoza was, in his own way, a deeply committed theist. He confirms this by showing the close ties between Spinoza's conception of God in his major works, and the conception of God and God's relation to the world found in Rabbinic Judaism.

Part III is concerned with "Laws: Natural and Divine." The first chapter in this section is Edwin Curley's "Descartes and Spinoza on the Laws of Nature." In his first book, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation*, Curley made Spinoza's views on the laws of nature in natural philosophy central to his metaphysics and to his view of the world. After many years—and much discussion of his views—Curley returns to this theme in his own work and in Spinoza's as he sees it. The piece is a personal reflection by one of the most influential

commentators on Spinoza in the English-speaking world on one of the central themes in Spinoza's thought, including the *Ethics* and the *TTP*, reflecting on his past thoughts as well as those of others, his sources and his critics. Though the focus is on laws of nature, it offers the reader a wide overview of the current state of interpretation of Spinoza's metaphysical thought from the mid-twentieth century to now. Curley discusses the laws of nature, first in Descartes and then in Spinoza, and the role that they play in Spinoza's metaphysics. He draws on both the *Ethics* and the *TTP*, but also on a wide variety of Spinoza's other texts. The chapter has implications for a wide variety of issues in Spinoza's thought, including the status of his definitions, his understanding of the substance-mode distinction, and the allegations that he was an atheist. The next chapter in this part, "'Divine Law' in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*" by Theo Verbeek, turns from Curley's concern with the laws of nature toward divine law. Verbeek examines the treatment of divine law, largely in the *TTP*, against the background of the view of God Spinoza presents in the *Ethics*, where God cannot be conceived as a lawgiver, and against the background of the Grotian conception of divine law as the result of divine will. After discussing the importance of the denial of divine will for Spinoza and the problems that it raises for a conception of divine law, Verbeek turns to the way in which Spinoza tries to reinterpret divine law as a "rule of life," a means for people to attain an end, some sort of highest good. Arguing that divine law cannot be successfully understood either as Grotian voluntary law, or as a rule of life, Verbeek explores its possible connection to politics, only to conclude its irrelevance there too. In the end, he concludes that, in a way, Spinoza's expressed views on divine law were almost certainly just a smoke screen to hide his real views. This suggests that Spinoza considered his real views too dangerous for him to express openly. On Verbeek's view, what Spinoza really held but hid was "the idea that there is no Divine Law at all…." The last chapter in Part III is Donald Rutherford's "Divine Law and the Right Way of Living: From the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* to the *Ethics*." Rutherford is concerned with Spinoza's notoriously obscure and difficult ethical doctrine in the *Ethics*.To gain a better understanding, he suggests that we appeal to the notion of divine law in the *TTP*. More precisely, we should consider the connection Spinoza draws in *TTP* 4 between divine laws and the principle of living [*ratio vivendi*] which he calls a universal ethics. In this way, Rutherford argues, we can see the *TTP* as constituting the hidden framework of the ethical doctrine of the *Ethics*.

Part IV deals with "Wonder, Final Causes, and Miracles." Wonder was one of the basic five passions for Descartes, central to his account of the passions. In his chapter, "Is Wonder a Remedy against the Passions? Spinoza's Struggle with Descartes's Legacy in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and in the *Ethics*," Andrea Sangiacomo treats Spinoza's ambivalent reaction to wonder over the course of his writings. In the *KV*, Sangiacomo notes, wonder is barely considered. It is dismissed as a cognitive attitude rather than an affect, properly speaking. However,

in the *TTP*, wonder plays a much more important, though ambivalent role. It can foster social cohesion in various ways but also disrupt society through the superstition that wonder can lead people to adopt. In the *Ethics*, by contrast, wonder loses its positive valence and becomes unambiguously problematic. As Spinoza comes to see sociability linked more and more to sharing a common nature, Sangiacomo sees wonder as interfering with social connection and thus as a negative affect. In her chapter, "Finalism, Religion, and Miracles: From the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* to the *Ethics*," Emanuela Scribano discusses Spinoza's account of the tendency people have to see purpose in nature and, in particular, in the miraculous intervention of God. Scribano examines the evolution of Spinoza's views on miracles and related views on finalism from the *TTP* to the *Ethics*, from something that arises from one particular group of people with their own special interests to a characteristic of people in general: their tendency to see nature acting for a purpose that corresponds to their special wants and needs. Her story takes us from Spinoza's account in the *TTP* of the Jews who invented final causes to argue that they are especially loved by a God doing things to their advantage, to the account in the *Ethics* where he sees the urge to posit final causes as a general tendency shared by all peoples.

Part V of the book deals with central issues in the *TTP*, "Revelation, Reason, and Salvation," issues which also have their reflection in the *Ethics*. The first chapter is "Spinoza's Views on Prophecy and the Prophets Revisited" by Ursula Renz and Philip Waldner. Their interest is in how prophecy fits into the world that Spinoza is trying to shape, particularly in the *TTP*. Renz and Waldner are fully aware that Spinoza does not accept the literal claims of prophets, yet, at the same time, on their view, Spinoza does not reject prophecy either. Rather, they try to understand the broadly social and even political roles that prophets and prophecy play in society for Spinoza. The second chapter in this part is Daniel Garber's "Philosophy and Theology, Reason and Revelation: The *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*." Garber's concern is Spinoza's strong claims about the independence of philosophy and theology in the *TTP*. He is especially concerned with an apparent contradiction between the two. For Spinoza, philosophy is the domain of reason, while theology is the domain of revelation and obedience. Yet in the *TTP*, Spinoza argues that obedience requires that one be, in some sense, committed to what he calls the "*dogmata* of Universal Faith." However, these *dogmata* involve a conception of God that seems blatantly inconsistent with the philosophical conception of God Spinoza puts forward in the *Ethics*. In his chapter, Garber proposes a way of understanding the conception of faith and obedience in the *TTP* that addresses this apparent inconsistency without undermining the independence of philosophy and theology. Next, we find Russ Leo's "Reason and Scripture in the *Ethics* and *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*: Jarig Jelles and Preface to the *Nagelate schriften van B.D.S.* (1677)." Leo focuses on one of the early interpreters of Spinoza's thought, Jarig Jelles, the author of the preface

to the Dutch translation of Spinoza's works. He shows how Jelles interprets the *TTP* through the *Ethics*, and how the philosophical account of salvation in the *Ethics* is reflected in the appeal to revelation in the *TTP*. As Leo reads Jelles, Spinoza's friend and interpreter sees a harmony between reason and Scripture and thus sees the rational philosophy of the *Ethics* and the revelation of the *TTP* as closely related. In this way, Leo argues, in his preface to the *Nagelate schriften*, Jelles presented Spinoza's work as in the intellectual tradition of the liberal Collegiant movement. The fourth chapter in this part is Kristin Primus's "Finding Oneself in God: *Scientia Intuitiva* as a Metaphysically Self-Locating Thought." In the *Ethics*, *scientia intuitiva*, the third kind of knowledge, is the ultimate goal of our intellectual development. Attaining it constitutes the ultimate salvation. But salvation can come even to those who do not attain this superior state of knowledge, namely to those capable of *reason*. According to the *TTP*, it can even be attained by those who follow the theologian in merely obeying God's imperative to love their neighbor as themselves. In this chapter, Primus explores what exactly the person who does attain *scientia intuitiva* attains, and how salvation understood in that way differs from the other attainable kinds of salvation. Finally, in this part, we find Julie Klein's "How to Make a Philosopher." A number of the chapters in this collection emphasize the radical distinction between the philosopher, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the theologian and the common person, or *vulgus*. The philosopher reaches *salus* and *animae acquiescentia* through the cultivation of reason, while the theologian and the common person attain it through revelation, through obedience to God, and by loving their neighbor as themselves, to the extent that they achieve it at all. Klein, however, explores how, on Spinoza's understanding, one can transcend the divide and become a philosopher, that is, how the teacher can make a philosopher out of someone who isn't one. She thus explores what she calls Spinoza's pedagogy, both in the *TTP* and in the *Ethics*. Exploiting Spinoza's idea of Christ as a teacher, she explores the pedagogical lessons that Spinoza took from Christ in the *TTP*, and how they are applied in the *Ethics* to bring the imperfectly rational person to a greater state of rationality, and to rational salvation. The irony of *using* Scripture to *overcome* the dependence on Scripture that characterizes Spinoza's conception of theology should not escape the reader.

Part VI on "Political Philosophy" concludes the book with some reflections on the social and political dimensions of Spinoza's thought in the *Ethics* and the *TTP*. The first chapter in this part is "Will, Sovereignty, and the Self in the *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*" by Michael A. Rosenthal. An evident tension exists between the *Ethics* and the *TTP* on the issue of the will. In the *Ethics*, the dissolution of the false idea of will and of its freedom are important to Spinoza's project. This project is a direct extension of the *TIE* which pursues a kind of salvation through purging the intellect of error [*TIE* 16]. By contrast, in the *TTP*, will appears central to the idea of law, both natural law (the will of God)

and civil law (the will of the sovereign). Even though will is known not to exist, it is an imaginative construct that is useful for understanding politics. Rosenthal argues that despite appearances, this same imaginative construct is at work in the *Ethics*, and for reasons analogous to the way it is used in the *TTP*. That is to say, just as we use the fiction of the sovereign's will when establishing the order of the state, we use the fiction of our own will when constituting ourselves.

The second chapter in this part and the last chapter in the volume is Jonathan Israel's "Where Is the Collective Morality in Spinoza's *Ethics*? Connecting Spinoza's *Ethics* to his Political Philosophy." Israel's aim is to show the coherence between the individualistic orientation of the *Ethics* and the politics of the *TTP*. Focusing on the notion of freedom, both personal and political, he shows how it can be seen to unify the individualistic account of the *Ethics* with the politics of the *TTP* and the *TP*.

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PART I

TWO INTERTWINED TEXTS

1

Parallel Masterpieces

Intertextuality in Spinoza's *Ethics* and *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

Piet Steenbakkers

1. Introduction

Although the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* did enjoy great popularity among freethinkers of all descriptions from the very beginning, a glance at the reception of Spinoza's thought shows that his place in the history of philosophy has always rested first and foremost on the exposition of his system as given in the *Ethics*, his masterpiece *par excellence*. Nor is this to be wondered at. As a book, the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* is difficult to pigeonhole: is it a pamphlet, an exercise in biblical philology, a political treatise? What is its philosophical status? Spinoza eventually entered the philosophical canon in the nineteenth century owing to his popularity among the German idealists, who had a marked preference for the metaphysics of the *Ethics*—a circumstance that will also have contributed to its reputation as the single most important work Spinoza wrote. Only in the last few decades has the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* been catching up, receiving unprecedented scholarly attention. Much work has been done by French scholars like Alexandre Matheron, Pierre-François Moreau, and Jacqueline Lagrée. Edwin Curley published two papers with the telling title "Notes on a Neglected Masterpiece." Theo Verbeek, Paul Bagley, Steven Nadler, and Susan James devoted full-length monographs to it,[1] and there have been numerous other publications. The present volume is another sign of this significant shift in interest.

What is it that makes these two texts, the *Ethics* and the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, stand out in Spinoza's oeuvre? One reason is that all his other works are incomplete: his geometric digest of *Renati des Cartes Principia philosophiae*, the early but never finished *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*, the Hebrew grammar, and the tantalizing text his death prevented him from accomplishing, the *Tractatus politicus*—they all end in unison with the set phrase *Reliqua*

[1] Curley, "Notes (I)"; Curley "Notes (II)"; Verbeek, *Exploring*; Bagley, *Philosophy, Theology, and Politics*; Nadler, *Forged in Hell*; James, *Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*.

desiderantur, "the rest is lacking."[2] That leaves us with the two works now under consideration. Both merit to be classed as masterpieces because of the highly sophisticated way they were composed. The austere, sustained geometric (or "synthetic") presentation of the argument in the *Ethics* and the passionate but superbly controlled rhetoric of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* are both unsurpassed. The *Ethics* addresses itself to those who want to understand nature philosophically, along the lines developed by Spinoza. The *Tractatus theologico-politicus* reaches out to a larger audience and tries to win consent also among people with quite different religious and philosophical convictions.[3] These individuating features—the *Ethics* geared up to *demonstrate*, the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* to *persuade*—play an important part in establishing the contexts of the works, and thereby the way Spinoza deploys his arguments.

With the *Ethics*, Spinoza managed to conceive and—what is more—accomplish an exposition of his entire philosophical system—a feat that sets him apart from virtually all other seventeenth-century thinkers. Though equally systematic and all-inclusive in approach and outlook, Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes, Leibniz—to mention only the giants of the period—never got around to offer comprehensive accounts of their respective systems. Spinoza did, and apparently he did so single-mindedly, resolved not to be led astray from what he saw as his supreme mission. The very fact that he interrupted his work on the *Ethics* for several years in order to write the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* reveals the urgency this new project had for him. Obviously, he realized that the freedom to philosophize was a precondition for the publication of his *Ethics*. But that was not all. Spinoza's philosophical message is one of liberation, of salvation through cognition. On the one hand, that requires a systematic and strictly philosophical exposition of the place human beings occupy in nature, and of the workings of the laws that determine their lives; on the other hand, it calls for a social and political program that will enable a gradual development towards an increasingly rational control of social processes by education and good laws. Thus, the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* was not just an obligatory intervention to clear the way for the *Ethics*, but itself part of a larger project of individual and collective liberation. The two books were written for different audiences, in different registers, for different purposes, but they belong to one and the same "master plan" or philosophical design, the argumentation is spurred on by the same urge that one senses in all of Spinoza's writings, and they share a common set of ideas. Because of the differences, one cannot simply blend them and import arguments from one to the other. This is

[2] No such disclaimer occurs in the *Cogitata metaphysica*, but as this occasional work is an appendix to the *DPP* and not a work in its own right, it does not qualify for the epithet "masterpiece" either.

[3] Though the Preface to the *TTP* explicitly addresses the "philosophical reader," that reader can grasp and subscribe to the argument of the book without necessarily sharing Spinoza's philosophical positions. James, *Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*, 26–34, offers a profound analysis of the audience Spinoza must have had in mind.

where the notion of intertextuality comes in. I will attempt to show that the two masterpieces are mutually illuminating precisely on account of intertextual effects that emerge out of the intertwined process of their conception.

When I speak of "parallel masterpieces," no association is intended with the so-called (and, it has been argued, wrongly so-called)[4] parallelism of the attributes. I just needed a term that could do justice to the specific relationship between the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* and the *Ethics*: each an independent, self-contained masterpiece that follows a track of its own, yet both produced in the same period, as parts of a coherent philosophical master plan. To my ears, "parallel" has the required connotations here.

I shall first go into the chronology of the two works. Next, I offer a selection of passages instancing the types of intertextuality that are operative here.

2. The *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*: Chronology

Spinoza began writing the work we now know under the title *Ethica* between May 1662 and January 1663.[5] Initially, he refers to this text in his correspondence as "my philosophy."[6] In fact, this is his second attempt to expound his philosophy in a systematic fashion. He abandoned an earlier one, which has not survived in its Latin original but only in a contemporary Dutch translation, the *Korte verhandeling van God, de mensch en deszelvs welstand* (*Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being*). The chronological order of Spinoza's early writings has not yet been established beyond all doubt, but the dating proposed by Filippo Mignini is now quite generally considered plausible.[7] According to his hypothesis, the *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione* predates the *Korte verhandeling*, which Spinoza presumably wrote in the early 1660s, immediately before he started working on the *Ethics*. When transcribing and correcting the *Korte verhandeling*, he decided to abandon that project and start anew, this time arranging the exposition in geometric order. From the correspondence with Oldenburg it is apparent that Spinoza had not yet embarked upon the *Ethics* in the first half of 1662. He must have started soon afterwards, for in February 1663 Simon de Vries wrote him a letter in which he describes how the circle of friends in Amsterdam

[4] For a criticism of this usage, see Jaquet, *From Parallelism to Equality*, 5–10.

[5] The biographical facts succinctly presented in this section are worked out more systematically in "Spinoza's Life," a chapter I contributed to the second edition of Garrett, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*. For an exhaustive treatment of Spinoza's printed works, see now Van de Ven, *Printing Spinoza*.

[6] For a more extended account of the textual history of the *Ethics* I refer to my chapter "Textual History." That overview was, however, published before the discovery of the Vatican manuscript of the *Ethics* in 2010. (See Spinoza, *Vatican Manuscript*.) The new critical edition of the Latin text, established by Fokke Akkerman and myself, contains a comprehensive introduction (written by Moreau and me), incorporating recent advances in textual scholarship. See O IV 13–47.

[7] Mignini, "Per la datazione"; Mignini, "Données et problèmes."

proceeded in discussing a work Spinoza was sending them in installments. The description leaves no doubt about the text in question: it was the beginning of the *Ethics*, which at that time already consisted of definitions, axioms, at least nineteen propositions, and some scholia.[8]

Initially Spinoza carried over to the *Ethics* the tripartite structure of the *Korte verhandeling*: Part 1 on God or nature, Part 2 on human beings and their place in nature (and more specifically on the human mind), and the final Part 3 on human salvation. That emerges from a letter (Letter 28 of the correspondence) Spinoza sent to an unidentified close friend in June 1665,[9] and from the epilogue to the anonymous treatise *Philosophia Sacrae Scripturae interpres* (1666), which heralds the publication of a work by someone who was to follow in Descartes's footsteps. It would deal with "God, the rational soul, man's supreme happiness and the way to eternal life."[10] Letter 28 shows that by June 1665 the work had made headway: the portion of Part 3 that Spinoza thought of dispatching goes as far as proposition 80. In the final version of the *Ethics*, Part 3 only has fifty-nine propositions.[11] Whether the difference, twenty-one propositions, was simply moved en bloc to what is now the beginning of Part 4 is difficult to ascertain. Spinoza may not only have cut up the text but reshuffled it as well. And one wonders when precisely the appendices to Parts 3 and 4 were inserted. Thus, the appendix of Part 3, the "Definitions of the Affects," will not yet, I assume, have featured in the text Spinoza considered to submit to the addressee of Letter 28. It rather looks like an exposition that he added later in order to round off the treatment of the affects.

Spinoza began writing the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* in the summer of 1665 and completed it in the final months of 1669.[12] The earliest reference to the work is to be found in Spinoza's Ep 30 to Henry Oldenburg, dated to the beginning of October 1665 (G IV 166/C II 12–15). Spinoza had broached the subject on September 4 in a preceding letter, now lost. This can be inferred from Oldenburg's reply: "I see that you are not so much philosophizing as (if it is permissible to

[8] As Freudenthal remarks (*Sein Leben*, 150), the citations in Ep 8 (and Spinoza's reply, Ep 9) indicate that the content of Part 1 of the *Ethics* as we now know it was essentially completed by February 1663. The arrangement of the material was subsequently adapted.

[9] The addressee is usually taken to be Johannes Bouwmeester. He certainly is a likely candidate, but other close friends qualify as well. See Mertens, "Van den Enden," 75, n. 43.

[10] "[…] de Deô, Animâ rationali, summâ hominis felicitate." See *Philosophia s. Scripturae interpres*, fol. P2^{v} (the book's final page). This treatise originated in Spinoza's environment. It is commonly attributed to Lodewijk Meyer, but Bouwmeester, too, may have had a share in it. See Mertens, "Van den Enden," 76, n. 44. The announcement quoted here is almost generally considered as referring to the *Korte verhandeling*, but erroneously so, for Spinoza had abandoned the idea of publishing that text already in 1661–2. It must refer to the *Ethics*. Note also that the received title of the *KV* has no equivalent for *anima rationalis*. This fits the second part of the *Ethics* ("*De mente*") better.

[11] Cf. also Ep 23, Spinoza to Blijenbergh, 13 January 1665, where Spinoza cites from his unpublished *Ethics*. Though not corresponding literally to any passage found in the final version of the text, the reference appears to be to his altruistic picture of those who live virtuously in E4p37, more particularly E4p37d and E4p37s.

[12] For the textual history of the *TTP* see my chapter "Text of Spinoza's." The account presented here is based on that chapter.

speak thus) theologizing; […] I ask you […] to indicate to me in your next letter what your plan and aim are in this writing of yours."[13] To this request Spinoza replied:

> I am now composing a treatise on my opinion regarding scripture. The considerations which move me to do this are the following:
>
> (1) the prejudices of the theologians; for I know that they are the greatest obstacle to men's being able to apply their minds to philosophy; so I am busy exposing them and removing them from the minds of the more prudent;
> (2) the opinion the common people have of me; they never stop accusing me of atheism, and I am forced to rebut this accusation as well as I can; and
> (3) the freedom of philosophizing and saying what we think, which I want to defend in every way; here the preachers suppress it as much as they can with their excessive authority and aggressiveness.[14]

On the title page, the year of publication is given as 1670, and this is confirmed by the earliest responses. On April 8, 1670, the council of the Reformed Church in Utrecht expresses its dismay at the publication of a profane and sacrilegious book they refer to as "a *Tractatus theologico-politicus* about the liberty to philosophize in the republic,"[15] and in the same month the Utrecht theologian Frans Burman reports having read the book.[16] The *Tractatus theologico-politicus* must therefore have been available early in 1670.[17]

From the summer of 1665 until the end of 1669, Spinoza appears to have put the *Ethics* on the back burner. Only after having finished the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* did he fully take up his work on the *Ethics* again. In the correspondence of 1666–7 we find several traces of the *Ethics*, but the work seems to have been nearly at a standstill.[18] In point of fact, we know very little about Spinoza's life between 1667 and 1671: hardly any letters from that period have come down to us.

[13] Ep 29 (C II 11, adapted). [14] Ep 30 (C II 14–15).

[15] Latin: "tractatus theologico-politicus de libertate philosophandi in republica." See Document No. 88 in Walther and Czelinski, *Lebensgeschichte* I, 278.

[16] Burman's son, Frans Burman the Younger, quotes an entry to that effect from his father's diary in Burman, *Burmannorum pietas*, 211.

[17] Most probably the distribution of the *TTP* started only in the first months of 1670. As it was not unusual for books printed at the end of a year to be postdated, the printing may have taken place in late 1669. In my "Text of Spinoza's," 30, n. 5, I relied on a quotation given by Bamberger from Burman's *Burmannorum pietas*, 204, to substantiate a dating between late 1669 and early 1670 (Bamberger, "Early Editions," 12 and 29, n. 28). Upon closer examination, however, it turns out that Burman assigns this range *not* to the *TTP*, but to the printing of (one or more quires) of a book written by his father, *Synopsis theologiae* ("aut exeunte anno LXIX, aut ineunte LXX typis describi debuerit"). Burman Junior defends his father against the serious accusation that he took a particular idea from Spinoza's *TTP*, which, he states, came out only in 1670 ("Spinozae liber anno illo LXX […] demum prodierit"). Though one may still allow the possibility that the *TTP* was printed late in 1669, Burman's testimony cannot be cited in support of this.

[18] See Ep 23 and Ep 34.

A letter (recently discovered by Albert Gootjes) from Bouwmeester to Johannes Georgius Graevius in Utrecht, from a slightly later date, August 7, 1673, shows that Bouwmeester is worried about Spinoza's oeuvre, for good reasons. Spinoza had travelled to Utrecht, a town which at that time was occupied by the French army. He had gone there at the invitation of a group of Cartesians and was hailed by libertines among the French officers. The reason for this mysterious visit is still unknown.[19] Bouwmeester acted as intermediary and impresario on behalf of Spinoza, Graevius was the contact person of the Utrecht group, and Jean-Baptiste Stouppe was the go-between for the French authorities. While Spinoza was away, his own hometown, The Hague, was threatened by the English fleet. In his letter to Graevius, Bouwmeester expressed his anxieties about the fate of "the literary output of Mr Spinosa's nocturnal studies."[20] I venture that Bouwmeester here hints at the autograph manuscript of the *Ethics*, which by then must have been well advanced. May we infer from this that what Spinoza had left in The Hague was the most recent version, that had not been copied or distributed yet?

We know that from the very moment Spinoza started working on the *Ethics*, partial copies of the *Ethics* circulated in Latin and in Dutch.[21] In May 1675, when the text was finished, Ehrenfried Walter von Tschirnhaus had a complete copy at his disposal.[22] More copies must have existed, but so far only Tschirnhaus's manuscript has been unearthed, and that only recently (in 2010) by Leen Spruit, in the Vatican Library.[23]

The young German nobleman Tschirnhaus had lived in the Netherlands from 1669 till 1674. He had been a student in Leiden, where he became friends with Pieter van Gent and Georg Hermann Schuller, who brought him into contact with Spinoza. In the spring of 1674, he returned home to his manor in Kieslingswalde in Lower Silesia (now Sławnikowice in Poland). Six months later he set out on his grand tour. His first stopover was Amsterdam, where he arrived in November 1674. He remained there until May 1675. In a letter of January 5, 1675 (Ep 59), he bombarded Spinoza with philosophical questions. References to the digression on the nature of bodies in *Ethics*, Part 2,[24] show that he already had a copy at his disposal, but this may have been a partial version. In the beginning of May, however, he departed from Amsterdam and went to London, with in his

[19] Recent work has shed new light on the circumstances and background of this episode. See van de Ven, "New Perspectives"; Gootjes, "French Libertines." On the unknown letters from Bouwmeester to Graevius see Gootjes, "Sources inédites."

[20] "[…] jam ego etiam nonnihil metuere caepi supellectili litterariae, lucubrationibusque D. Spinosae." See Bouwmeester, "Letter." Albert Gootjes, Jeroen van de Ven, and I are preparing an edition of Bouwmeester's letters to Graevius.

[21] See Ep 8, Simon de Vries to Spinoza, February 24, 1663; and Jarig Jelles's preface to *NS*, fol. 6*2^{v}.

[22] Witness Ep 72, Spinoza to Schuller, November 18, 1673 (G IV 305/C II 465): "in ipsius exemplari."

[23] Spinoza, *Vatican Manuscript*.

[24] Spinoza himself announces this section as "a few things about the nature of bodies" (*pauca de natura corporum*) at E2p13s (G II 97/C I 458). It is also known as the "physical excursion."

luggage a manuscript of the complete *Ethics*, as copied by his friend Pieter van Gent.[25] Tschirnhaus took the copy with him on his European travels, on which he encountered (among many others) Oldenburg, Leibniz, and Christian Huygens. In August 1677, he met Niels Stensen (Nicolaus Steno) in Rome. Stensen, who had converted to Roman Catholicism, diddled him out of the manuscript and brought it as a trophy to the Inquisition. After 333 years it surfaced in the Vatican Library.

Van Gent made the transcription for Tschirnhaus during the latter's second sojourn in the Netherlands, so the copying must have taken place between early November 1674 and early May 1675. Thus, even if we cannot establish when exactly Spinoza finished the *Ethics*, the terminus ante quem must be May 1675. That fits in nicely with what we know about Spinoza's abortive attempt to get the *Ethics* published in the summer of 1675. In a letter dated July 22, Oldenburg refers to Spinoza's intention, as expressed in a lost letter of July 5, to publish what was by then a "treatise in five parts" (*tractatus quinque-partitus*).[26] With this in view, Spinoza did indeed go to Amsterdam at the end of July or early August: that can be inferred from a later letter to Oldenburg:

> Just as I received your letter of 22 July, I set out for Amsterdam, intending to commit to the press the book I wrote to you about. While I was dealing with this, a rumor was spread everywhere that a certain book of mine about God was in the press, and that in it I tried to show that there is no God. Many people, indeed, accepted this rumor. As a result certain theologians, perhaps the authors of the rumor, took the opportunity to complain about me to the prince [of Orange] and the Magistrates. Moreover, the stupid Cartesians, because they are believed to favor me, try to remove that suspicion from themselves by constantly denouncing my opinions and writings everywhere. Even now they're still at it.
>
> Since I had learned these things from certain men worthy of trust, who at the same time said that the theologians were setting traps for me everywhere, I decided to put off the publication I was planning, until I saw how the matter would turn out. And I resolved to let you know what plan I would then pursue. But every day the matter seems to get worse, and I don't know what I should do.[27]

The rumor as well as the theologians' call to arms are confirmed in two contemporary sources, both datable to around August 12–14.[28] Given Spinoza's attempt at

[25] Totaro, Spruit, and Steenbakkers, "L'*Ethica* di Spinoza."
[26] Ep 62 (G IV 273, lines 7–9/C II 435).
[27] Ep 68, written in September or October 1675; C II 459, adapted; brackets in the original.
[28] On August 12 (Old Style August 22), the consistory of the Walloon Church in Utrecht instructed its delegates to the Kampen synod thus: "Ils proposeront à la vénérable compagnie s'il ne seroit pas de son devoir de suplier par des députez nos seigneurs les États généraux, Monseigneur le prince d'Orange, et Messieurs les États respectifs des provinces, et particulièrement ceux de Hollande d'empêcher par leur autorité un nommé Spinosa qui n'est que trop connu en ces cartiers par les

publication in August 1675, then, I surmise that he had finished the *Ethics* earlier that year, rather than in 1674. We may thus tentatively narrow down the date of the completion of the *Ethics* to somewhere between January and April 1675.

A comparison of the Vatican manuscript with the printed version of the *Ethics* as it appeared in the *Opera posthuma* after Spinoza's death in 1677 reveals a considerable number of variant readings, most of them trivial.[29] These have several different origins. To begin with, Van Gent's copy suffers from many transcription errors; he must have worked in great haste and he manifestly did not check his copy against the exemplar (Spinoza's autograph) afterwards. Nor were the compositors of the *Opera posthuma* infallible: though on the whole the book was carefully printed, it does contain misprints. Again, many of the variants between the manuscript and the printed text are the result of editorial interventions by the friends of Spinoza who prepared the *Opera posthuma* for the press, complying with Spinoza's explicit final instructions for publication. The editors carried out their task reverently: they restricted themselves to grammatical, syntactic, and stylistic adjustments and refrained from substantial textual changes. But they, too, occasionally made mistakes. How about any authorial interventions? In principle, Spinoza himself may also have changed readings after the moment the Vatican manuscript had been copied by Van Gent, that is to say, in the final two years of his life. One of the surprising results of the detailed collation of the sources that Fokke Akkerman and I have undertaken is that nothing points in that direction—quite the contrary.[30] Apparently, Spinoza never systematically went through the entire text of the *Ethics* again after having completed the work. Instead, he must have concentrated on composing the *Tractatus politicus*. If Spinoza had revised the text, he would have corrected errors and removed unclarities that are now still to be found in the Latin text of the *Ethics* in *both* sources: *Opera posthuma* and the Vatican manuscript. The occurrence of such conjunctive errors indicates that it was their common source, i.e. Spinoza's own

impiétez qu'il y a enseignées et dans ses livres et dans ses conversations de semer ses erreurs détestables et son athéisme dans ce pais, et particulièrement dans nos académies, comme il fait à La Haye, à Leide, et en d'autres lieux, non seulement tout ouvertement et avec une entière liberté, mais aussi avec insulte et comme en trionfant de la Religion, au grand scandale des infirmes, à la risée des ennemis de la vérité, et à la honte de cet État et de toute l'Église Réformée." The Utrecht Archives, HUA 832, No. 2, 10 (courtesy of Albert Gootjes). And in a letter to Adriaan Blyenburgh, August 14, 1675 (published in Schotel, ed., *Theodori Ryckii*, 6), Theodorus Ryckius (or de Rycke) complains: "Inter nos rumor est auctorem *Tractatus Theologico Politici* in promptu habere librum de Deo et Mente, multo priore isto periculosiorem. Tuum erit et illorum, qui Tecum in navi Reipub. regendâ occupantur, videre, ne libellus iste divulgetur."

[29] See our introduction to the new critical edition of the *Ethics*, O IV 21–2, and Tableau I, O IV 67–71. The Vatican manuscript itself can be consulted online (http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.12838).

[30] E4p49d may well be a rare example of an authorial revision: Spinoza there systematically reformulated the demonstration to apply the proposition (overestimation makes a person proud) to human beings generally ("we" instead of "someone"). He possibly did so when he was writing *TP* 7.27 (G III 319–20/C II 558–9), on the universality of the affects; see O IV 584–5, note 242.

autograph, that contained the mistakes or gave rise to confusion. I found five readings where the Latin sources both offer a flawed text.[31]

We know for a fact that Spinoza did write preparatory material before he embarked on the *Ethics* (notably the *Korte verhandeling*). It is possible that Spinoza also wrote one or more earlier texts that may have gone into the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* as we have it. In that case, his preparatory work on the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* may be considered to have started before the summer of 1665, possibly even a decade earlier. There are some indications that he did react to his banning from the Amsterdam Jewish community in 1656 with a written defense, a "Vindication of his dissent from Judaism."[32] If that is indeed true, parts of that unknown text may have been included in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. As long as we do not know the content (let alone the actual wording) of this or other putative forerunners of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, we cannot take them into account in comparing the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* and the *Ethics*.

A small and somewhat peculiar corpus in Spinoza's oeuvre is the set of notes known as the *Adnotationes ad Tractatum theologico-politicum*. In two letters, written in the autumn of 1675, Spinoza brought up his plan to supply a number of explanatory notes to the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*.[33] On July 25, 1676, half a year before his death, he gave a copy of the first edition to a certain Jacobus Statius Klefmann.[34] In the margins of the text, Spinoza entered five annotations. In the early nineteenth century, the Klefmann copy turned up in the university library

[31] The textual issues are too complex to be dealt with here, so I must limit myself to a brief inventory. A full account is given in the introduction to the new critical edition of the *Ethics* (O IV 63–6). (1) E2p39 (O IV 212, 25–6/C I 474): word order mangled; (2) E3p30s (O IV 280, 16–19/C I 511): twice *externae* (instead of *internae*); (3) E4p9s (O IV 358, 8–9/C I 551): word lacking (*praesens*); (4) E4p12c, dem. (O IV 360, 24–5/C I 552) word lacking (*quam*); (5) E4p66 (O IV 422, 8–9, and see note 255/C I 583) some words missing (conjecture: *prae bono*). In the first three cases *De nagelate schriften* came up with an intelligible solution. This need not mean that the Dutch translator had access to a corrected version. A scribe and a compositor can simply reproduce the Latin as found in their exemplar, even if it does not make sense, but a translator must somehow turn the source text into a meaningful sentence.

[32] According to Salomon van Til (in the preface to *Het voor-hof der heydenen*), Spinoza had written a vindication (in Spanish) for his dissent from Judaism (quoted in Walther and Czelinski, *Lebensgeschichte* I, 399). Two German travellers, Stolle and Hallmann, who visited Jan Rieuwertsz the Younger, the son of Spinoza's publisher, in 1703, reported that he mentioned "a large work Spinoza had written against the Jews" before the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* and which his father had not published but given away (Walther and Czelinski, *Lebensgeschichte* I, 85). It is possible, though by no means certain, that Van Til and Rieuwertsz refer to the same text. Another possible interpretation (Walther and Czelinski, *Lebensgeschichte* II, 56, n. 157) is that in preparing the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, Spinoza wrote several texts, not all of which were eventually included. If that is correct, the documents mentioned by Van Til and Rieuwertsz may well be different parts of that family of manuscripts. For a tentative hypothesis about the content of this "Vindication," see Curley, "Spinoza's Lost Defense."

[33] Ep 68, Spinoza to Oldenburg, September/October 1675 (G IV 299/C II 459) and Ep 69, Spinoza to Van Velthuysen, autumn 1675 (G IV 300–1/C II 460–1).

[34] With the following dedication on the title page: "Nobilissimo D◦ D◦. Jacobo statio Klefmanno Dono D. Autor, et nonnullis notis illustravit illasque propria manu scripsit Die 25. Julii Anno 1676" ("Donated to Mr Jacobus Statius Klefmann by the author, who adorned it with some notes, written in his own hand, on July 25, 1676").

of Königsberg (now Kaliningrad). In 1945, it was salvaged from the rubble in the streets of that city. It was donated in 1951 to the Haifa University Library, where it is still kept. More annotated presentation copies may have circulated, but this is the only one that has survived. In 1678, as many as thirty-one annotations were published in French as an appendix to Saint-Glain's translation of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. In the course of time, several more collections of annotations came to light, in Latin, Dutch, and French. All of them contain the five seminal ones that Spinoza had entered in Klefmann's copy (the numbers 2, 6, 7, 13, and 14), but the total number eventually rose to thirty-nine annotations. The transmission of these *Adnotationes* has been thoroughly studied by Fokke Akkerman.[35] His findings were that all extant collections ultimately depend on Spinoza's personal copy, now lost, into which someone else must have entered a number of additional notes.[36] Several of the notes are not authentic Spinoza material at all: they look rather like secondary readers' comments.[37]

In outline, then, the chronology may be presented thus: Spinoza worked intensively on the *Ethics* between 1662 and 1665 and again between 1669 and 1675; and on the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* between 1665 and 1669. At the time he was composing the *Tractatus politicus*, between 1675 and 1677, he added some notes to the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, but left the *Ethics* as he had finished it in 1675.

3. Texts, Context, Intertextuality: Instances

I will now deal with a number of instances of intertextuality between the *Ethics* and the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* in order to illustrate the various ways in which these two texts are interrelated. On the level of the genesis of the works, we can sometimes see what was on Spinoza's mind when he transferred certain terms or concepts from one to the other, looking at them afresh in a different context. At times the interaction reveals something of his rhetorical strategies. As to the philosophical implications, I advance the hypothesis that the *Ethics* and the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* are systematically coherent, if one takes the different contexts into account. An attentive analysis of the philosophical vocabulary of the *Ethics* can guide us in understanding what Spinoza wanted to convey in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* and how that fits in with his own position.

(i) To begin with, there are a few striking references to biblical items in the *Ethics*. The *Tractatus theologico-politicus* abounds with them, of course, but they seem out of place in the synthetic exposition of the *Ethics*. The most important

[35] Akkerman, "Texte latin," 213–23. Cf. also Akkerman's introduction in O III 28–37.
[36] Viz. Annotations 18, 33, 35, and 39.
[37] Namely, the numbers 15, 18, 20, 27–30, 33, 35, and 39.

passage in this respect is E4p68s, where Spinoza mentions Moses, Adam and Eve, the Patriarchs, and (the Spirit of) Christ. The context is the knowledge of good and evil, and Spinoza's approach here has affinities with that of Maimonides,[38] an authority often cited (and criticized) in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. Obviously, Spinoza does not accept the biblical story of the Fall as an explanation of the fact that human beings are unfree, i.e. that they are not led by reason alone. The scholium reads like a thought experiment in which Spinoza tests his own philosophical views on the biblical narrative. He suggests that, after the Fall, Adam started imitating the affects of the lower animals in accordance with the mechanism explained in E3p27. As the scholium to E4p68 is never referred to in the rest of the *Ethics*, it remains something of a digression, which makes it the more remarkable. It seems as though Spinoza was so excited about the fascinating material he had been exploring in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* that he could not resist using it in the *Ethics* as an illustration.

(ii) The unspecified expression "some of the Hebrews" (*quidam Hebraeorum*) in E2p7s is usually taken by commentators to target Maimonides.[39] The medieval Jewish philosopher has recently also been identified as a decisive influence on Spinoza's comment in E5p36s that the intellectual love of God "is called Glory in the Sacred Scriptures—not without reason" (G II 303, 5/C I 612). According to Warren Zev Harvey, the reference is to Isaiah 58:8, a verse Spinoza also quotes (and reportedly mistranslates) in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*.[40] Harvey notes that Spinoza derives the interpretation that informs both uses of that scriptural passage from Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed* III:51 (towards the end). There we read:

> …our Sages figuratively call the knowledge of God united with intense love for Him a kiss […]. This kind of death, which in truth is deliverance from death, has been ascribed by our Sages to none but to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. The other prophets and pious men are beneath that degree: but their knowledge of God is strengthened when death approaches. Of them Scripture says, "Thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward" (Isa. lviii. 8). The intellect of these men remains then constantly in the same condition, since the obstacle is removed that at times has intervened between the intellect and the object of its action: it continues for ever in that great delight, which is not like bodily pleasure. [Maimonides, *Guide*, III:51, 391]

[38] Maimonides, *Guide*, I:2. See Rudavsky, "Jewish Philosophical Influences," 76.
[39] See e.g. Wolfson, *Philosophy of Spinoza*, II, 24 (citing Maimonides, *Guide* I:68).
[40] *TTP* 5 (G III 71/C II 141). See Harvey, "'Ishq," 105. Harvey's solution to this riddle is convincing. Earlier attempts to identify the citation in E5p36s (for instance Wolfson, *Philosophy of Spinoza*, II, 311–17) were unsuccessful.

(iii) The examples adduced so far reveal how Spinoza, after having written the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, looks afresh at the philosophical concepts and terminology he employs in the *Ethics*. There is also an influence in the other direction, for in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* we occasionally encounter philosophical concepts developed in the *Ethics*. They are usually not explained in any depth, because it is not Spinoza's purpose to expound his own philosophy. Here is a small selection.

(a) In chapter 6 of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* Spinoza uses the concept of "nature," adding the following footnote: "NB: By Nature here I do not understand only matter and its affections, but in addition to matter, infinite other things".[41] It is significant that he feels the need to disown a reductionist, "materialist" acceptation of the term "nature," while remaining prudently tacit about his own philosophical view. He is well aware of the controversial issues involved, but does not want these to overshadow the argument he makes here.

(b) In E1app Spinoza employs the famous expression *ignorantiae asylum* (G II 81, 11/C I 443) to denounce the lazy habit of resorting to the will of God when explanations come to an end. (Before Spinoza, the expression served to criticize the scholastic notion of occult qualities: Oldenburg uses it like that in Letter 3,[42] and that may have been Spinoza's ultimate source.) A similar critique of this use of God's will occurs in *CM* 2.7: "So it is ridiculous for the philosophers to take refuge in the will of God whenever they are ignorant of the causes of things."[43] And in chapter 6 of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* we read more or less the same: "So those who have recourse to the will of God when they have no knowledge of a thing are just trifling. It's a ridiculous way of confessing one's ignorance" (G III 86, 3–4/C II 157).

(c) In the proximity of this passage in chapter 6 of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* we also find another familiar theme: *sub quadam specie aeternitatis*, "under a certain species of eternity," speaking of the necessity and immutability of nature's laws. In the same form (with *quadam*) the expression occurs in *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione* [*TIE* 108 (G II, 39, 16–17/C I 44)] and in E2p44c2 (G II 126/C I 481). In Part 5 of the *Ethics*, we encounter this phrase without *quadam*: *sub aeternitatis specie* and *sub specie aeternitatis*.[44]

[41] C II 154, n. 4.

[42] Dated September 27, 1661 (G IV 10–12/C I 168–70). Julius Caesar Scaliger was the first to use that expression (in the form *asylum inscitiae*) to deride occult qualities, in his *Exotericae*, §8, 344. See Mclean, "Interpretation." In Ep 75, Spinoza to Oldenburg, January 1, 1676 (G IV 313, 7–8/C II 471), Spinoza uses an expression similar to *asylum ignorantiae*, viz. *redigendo ad ignorantiam*, when discussing miracles.

[43] C I 326 (adapted). The two first paragraphs of this chapter, from which the quoted text was taken, occur only in the Dutch translation of the *CM*, published in 1664; they are lacking in the Latin text of 1663.

[44] E5p22 (G II 295, 5/C I 607); E5p23s (G II 295, 30; 296, 9/C I 607; 608); and E5p29–31s (G II 298, 10–G II 300, 11/C I 609–11).

(d) The poetic metaphor "eyes of the mind" that Spinoza borrowed from Leone Ebreo[45] to denote demonstrations occurs in the *Ethics*: "For the eyes of the mind, by which it sees and observes things, are the demonstrations themselves" [E5p23s (G II 296, 6–7/C I 608)]. It also informs the following sentence in chapter 13 of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*: "Invisible things, and those which are the objects only of the mind, can't be seen by any other eyes than by demonstrations."[46]

(e) In a passage in E4app28, Spinoza offers an intriguing qualification of the social function of money—one that has been picked up by, among others, Karl Marx:[47] "Verum omnium rerum compendium pecunia attulit" ("money brought about a short way to all things").[48] In chapter 5 of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, the economic notion of *rerum compendium* is echoed, but here Spinoza is thinking of the social division of labor, rather than of money: "Society is most useful and indeed indispensable not only for living securely from enemies, but also for creating a short way to many things, for unless people are willing to help each other they lack the skills and time to support and preserve themselves as well as they can."[49]

(iv) To round off this display of instances of intertextuality, I will now present two parallels in more detail because I think they show how the different contexts of the *Ethics* and the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* yield significantly different perspectives.

[45] See Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, *Dial.* III, fol. 107^{v}: "la [belleza] spirituale […] s'apprende per gl'occhi de l'Anima, o de l'intelletto." Spinoza owned a Spanish translation of these dialogues.

[46] *TTP* 13 (G III 170, 9–11/C II 260).

[47] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 131: "Es [das Geld] ist der '*précis de toutes les choses*,' worin ihr besondrer Charakter verwischt; der allgemeine Reichtum als kurzgefaßtes Kompendium gegenüber seiner Ausbreitung und Zersplitterung in der Welt der Waren." Virtually the same wording is to be found in Marx's *Zur Kritik*, 103. Marx took the French quotation from Pierre le Pesant de Boisguilbert (*Grundrisse*, 894; *Zur Kritik*, 103), but the striking occurrence of the word "Kompendium" (which is absent from Boisguilbert's text) must be due to Marx's reading of Spinoza. See also Schrader, *Substanz und Begriff*, 10–11.

[48] (G II 274, 17–18.) The translation here is mine; the *compendium* is not readily recognizable in Curley's rendering ("money has provided a convenient instrument for acquiring all these aids", C I 593). Note that the Vatican manuscript here reads *argentum* instead of *pecunia*.

[49] My translation. The Latin reads (in Akkerman's edition): "Societas non tantum ad secure ab hostibus vivendum, sed etiam ad multarum *rerum compendium* faciendum perutilis est et maxime etiam necessaria; nam nisi homines invicem operam mutuam dare velint, ipsis et ars et tempus deficeret ad se, quoad ejus fieri potest, sustentandum et conservandum" [O III 218; emphasis mine]. Cf. Curley's translation: "A social order is very useful, and even most necessary, not only for living securely from enemies, but also for making many things efficiently. For if men were not willing to give mutual assistance to one another, they would lack both skill and time to support and preserve themselves as far as possible" (C II 143).

(f) *Exemplar*.[50] One of the distinctive innovations of early modern mechanistic philosophy was its rejection of final causes or, as it came to be called in the eighteenth century, teleology. This is central to Francis Bacon's critique of Aristotelianism and of Scholasticism. It is also crucial to Spinoza's metaphysics, as he himself emphasizes in the appendix to Part 1 of the *Ethics*. There he argues that the fundamental set of prejudices that gives rise to all other errors about nature is a baleful combination of teleology, anthropomorphism, and anthropocentrism: because human beings do everything for an end, they assume by analogy that other things in nature, and even God, will act for certain ends as well, and they take themselves to be the centre around which the world was created. Spinoza rejects these biases and with them the notion of a divine creator.

The insistence on a rational life informs Spinoza's metaphysics, ethics, and political philosophy. The true life of the mind as a distinctive feature of a genuinely human life is embodied in his ideal of a fully rational human being: "an idea of man, as a model of human nature," set forth in the preface to Part 4 of the *Ethics*:

> …because we desire to form an idea of man, as a model of human nature which we may look to, it will be useful to us to retain these same words [viz. good and evil] with the meaning I have indicated. In what follows, therefore, I shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature that we set before ourselves. By evil, what we certainly know prevents us from becoming like that model. Next, we shall say that men are more perfect or imperfect, insofar as they approach more or less near to this model.[51]

It is only towards the end of Part 4 of the *Ethics* (from E4p66s onwards) that Spinoza returns to this model of human nature. He does not, however, use the term *exemplar* again, but refers instead to the "free human being" (*homo liber*), that is, a person guided solely by reason. The opposite is the *homo servus*, the slave, or the *ignarus*, the ignorant. Note the tight links between freedom and reason, and between bondage and ignorance. In Part 5, Spinoza will explicitly refer to Stoicism, mainly in order to emphasize his distance to it. He nevertheless adopts the Stoic terminology of the opposition between the sage (*sapiens*) and the

[50] As I show elsewhere, the background of Spinoza's usage of the term *exemplar* is to be sought in the Platonic tradition: see my essay "Living Well."

[51] C I 545. Latin text: "quia ideam hominis, tanquam naturae humanae exemplar, quod intueamur, formare cupimus, nobis ex usu erit haec eadem vocabula eo, quo dixi, sensu retinere. Per bonum itaque in seqq. intelligam id, quod certo scimus medium esse, ut ad exemplar humanae naturae, quod nobis proponimus, magis magisque accedamus. Per malum autem id, quod certo scimus impedire, quo minus idem exemplar referamus. Deinde homines perfectiores aut imperfectiores dicemus, quatenus ad hoc idem exemplar magis aut minus accedunt" (O IV 344–6).

ignorant (*ignarus*), in both the opening lines of that part (E5pref) and its concluding paragraph (E5p52s), which is at the same time the resounding conclusion of the entire book. Spinoza's ideal model of moral behavior was at least in part inspired by the Stoic tradition.[52]

In Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, the term *exemplar* is used, too, but then not for a *human* construct but for a *divine* ideal,[53] viz. God as the model of a true, virtuous life:

> We see, then, that Jeremiah, Moses and John sum up the knowledge of God each person is bound to have by locating it only (as we maintained) in this: that God is supremely just and supremely merciful, or, that he is the unique model of the true life. [*TTP* 13 (C II 262, adapted)][54]

And again, he states as the first tenet of the universal faith that "God exists, i.e., that there is a supreme being, supremely just and merciful, or a model of true life".[55]

It is not a coincidence that Spinoza defines the model of a true, that is, a rational and virtuous life in the *Ethics* as a philosophical, human construct and in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* as a supremely just and merciful God. This is intimately linked to the different perspectives and strategies of the two books: the *Ethics* shows a philosophical road to salvation through reason. Yet it also emphasizes that human beings will always be only partly rational; to some extent they will remain under the sway of emotional forces they cannot control. The idealized human nature that serves as a model in the *Ethics* helps human beings, insofar as they are rational, to organize their own lives. The *Tractatus theologico-politicus* therefore shows an alternative: true religion can also provide moral guidance, in that it teaches the fundamental divine law, that is, to love God by loving your neighbor as yourself. The difference is that this rule is here presented as a *commandment* to be obeyed, not as an *insight* to be grasped. Yet in both texts the *models* occupy the same position, viz. that of unattainable ideals from which we may take our bearings.

[52] For the differences, see Miller, *The Stoics*, 126–32.

[53] It might be argued that for Spinoza a divine ideal *is* a human construct, but that would subordinate the argument of the *TTP* to Spinoza's philosophy in the *Ethics*. This is precisely what Spinoza wants to avoid: the validity of the *TTP* does not depend on the reader's acceptance of Spinoza's own system, because the effectiveness of faith cannot be demonstrated by reason: "We can't perceive by the natural light that simple obedience is a path to salvation" [*TTP* 15 (G III 188/C II 281)]. This is crucial to the argument of *TTP* 15.

[54] Latin text: "Videmus itaque Jeremiam, Mosen, Johannem Dei cognitionem, quam unusquisque scire tenetur, paucis comprehendere eamque in hoc solo, ut volebamus, ponere, quod scilicet Deus sit summe justus et summe misericors, sive unicum verae vitae exemplar" (O III 458).

[55] *TTP* 14 (C II 268; adapted). The Latin reads: "I. Deum, hoc est, ens supremum, summe justum et misericordem, sive verae vitae exemplar, existere; qui enim nescit vel non credit ipsum existere, ei obedire nequit neque eum Judicem noscere" (O III 474). The expression *verae vitae exemplar* occurs two more times in chapter 14 (O III 467, 20–2; C II 269, 15–17).

(g) *The Seven Tenets of the Universal Faith*. Spinoza's treatment of God as the model of true life occurs in the context of his famous and much discussed version of the so-called "minimal creed" in chapter 14 of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. This is the set of seven doctrines or tenets of the universal faith that can be rationally deduced from the fundamental principle of Scripture, i.e. "that there is a supreme being, who loves justice and loving-kindness; that everyone, if he is to be saved, is bound to obey this being and to worship him by practicing justice and loving-kindness toward his neighbor" (C II 268; adapted). Disputes about the extent to which these seven rather anthropomorphically formulated tenets are compatible with Spinoza's own philosophical views as developed in the *Ethics* are, as I see it, beside the point. What is crucial here is that Spinoza rationally deduces a set of moral ideas from the *definition*, or *essence*, of faith, viz. obedience: faith is "thinking such things about God that if you had no knowledge of them, obedience to God would be destroyed, whereas if you are obedient to God, you necessarily have these thoughts" (C II 266).[56] If one compares the Latin text of this definition with E2def2, it is clear that for Spinoza obedience indeed constitutes the *essence* of faith, in the strict and distinctive philosophical definition of essence he offers in the *Ethics*.[57] Therefore Spinoza must present the seven tenets as incontrovertible *if*, and *only if*, faith is given: "No one can fail to be aware that it is especially necessary to know all these things in order that men may be able, without exception, to obey God according to the command of the Law explained above. For if any of these tenets is taken away, obedience is also destroyed" [*TTP* 14 (C II 269)].[58] Without faith, the religious way to salvation is unavailable. The imperative here is conditional: *if* your way to salvation is one of faith, *then* you must accept this doctrine as true. It is not an unconditional, absolute imperative; not a rigorously deduced philosophical insight that Spinoza himself is committed to endorse. I think he expresses these reservations clearly and unambiguously enough in the text, so the question whether Spinoza contradicts his own philosophical views as set forth in the *Ethics* is off target.

[56] Latin text: "Ut itaque rem totam ordine ostendam, a fidei definitione incipiam, quae ex hoc dato fundamento sic definiri debet, nempe quod nihil aliud sit quam de Deo talia sentire, quibus ignoratis tollitur erga Deum obedientia, et hac obedientia posita necessario ponuntur" (O III 468–70).

[57] E2def2: "Ad essentiam alicujus rei id pertinere dico, quo dato res necessario ponitur et quo sublato res necessario tollitur, vel id, sine quo res et vice versa quod sine re, nec esse nec concipi potest" (O IV 160). Curley's translation, slightly adapted: "I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing" (C I 447). Cf. also E2p10s2 and *KV* 2, preface, 5. Spinoza's application of his own concept of essence to the *TTP* has been brought to the fore by Aaron Garrett in an important article, "Knowing the Essence." It can be found in the *TP* as well: when fear and respect of the commonwealth are destroyed, so is the commonwealth itself [*TP* 4.4 (G III 293/C II 527)].

[58] Latin text: "Atque haec omnia nemo ignorare potest apprime cognitu necessaria esse, ut homines, nullo excepto, ex praescripto legis supra explicato, Deo obedire possint, nam horum aliquo sublato tollitur etiam obedientia" (O III 476).

4. Conclusion

What do these instances of intertextuality teach us? Given the circumstances, with Spinoza's writing of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* sandwiched between two substantial stretches in which he concentrated exclusively on the *Ethics*, there must have been a reciprocal spillover from one text to the other. Moreover, the two parallel works are part of a single master plan—at least that is what I have argued. These mutual influences should not, however, lure us into considering the two masterpieces as equivalent in their philosophical content. The last instance we discussed shows that precisely Spinoza's original philosophical development of the notion of *essence* in the *Ethics* can help us find our bearings here.

A popular image of Spinoza (and one with a long tradition) is that he was a militant atheist, on a mission to undermine and even destroy all forms of religion. While it is incontrovertible that he strove to curb the power of religious rabble-rousers, and to defuse the repressive climate of fanaticism and sectarianism created by superstition, he did not seem to hold that religion would ever go away, nor that its disappearance was a necessary condition for peace, toleration, and morality.[59] According to the view Spinoza gradually developed while composing the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, religion was rooted in human imagination and in their affects, notably in fear. On account of its affective origins, Spinoza saw religion as an inexorable phenomenon: people will always be susceptible to fear and distress, and therefore to a temptation to invent gods and invest them with anthropomorphic features, seeing them as beings to whom they can turn for comfort and support. Human beings cannot be absolutely free in Spinoza's strict sense of the word, i.e. guided solely by reason. Hence attempts to eradicate religion will be futile. It is wiser to strengthen the potentially constructive social and moral functions true religion may have for society. And that, I submit, is what the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* is about. In it, Spinoza demonstrates that a naive belief in the truth of all stories in the Bible, and the disastrous superstitious practices this entails—such as the presumptuousness of religious leaders, the repression and persecution of critics and dissenters—is untenable for anyone who can think even the least bit rationally. His definition of the essence of faith is an attempt to salvage the possibility of a religious inspiration for social and moral conduct, while it shows at the same time that superstition, sectarianism, and fanaticism can derive no legitimate excuse from any religion, nor from the Bible.

The interpretation I suggest here is most emphatically *not* an esoteric reading of the texts. I take Spinoza at his word, and I take both the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* and the *Ethics* entirely seriously and (if I may say so) literally.

[59] This point is further developed in Nellen and Steenbakkers, "Biblical Philology," 54–6. See also Touber, *Spinoza and Biblical Philology*.

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2

Continuity and Discontinuity between the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and the *Ethics*

Pina Totaro

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I would like to show that despite the diversity of their subjects, their structures, and their specific purposes, the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (*TTP*) and the *Ethics* are inspired by a single philosophical vision.[1] The editorial history of the two works, as reconstructed by Piet Steenbakkers, testifies to their profound interweaving, connections, and reciprocal implications.[2] A provisional draft of the first part of *Ethics* was completed by Spinoza before 1662. As Spinoza conceived it at that time, the *Ethics* consisted of only three parts. A new but still unfinished draft of the *Ethics* circulated among some friends after the publication in 1663 of *The Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* (*Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae pars I et II*). But from the summer of 1665 to the autumn of 1669, Spinoza set the *Ethics* aside and composed his *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, which was published in 1670. In that same year he returned to the *Ethics*, reformulating the text that he had considered almost definitive five years earlier, and completed it in 1675. In this way work on the *Ethics* both precedes and follows the composition of the *TTP*.

[1] In much of the critical literature, the contents and conclusions of the *TTP* and *Ethics* are considered to be profoundly different from each other. It is often claimed that the *TTP* and *Ethics* are two completely different works, both for the topic, for their purposes, and also for the public to whom they are addressed. On this reading, only the *Ethics* is directed to real philosophers and is exclusively a work of philosophy, while the *TTP* deals with exegetical, political, and religious policy issues. Understood in this way, the *lector philosophus* whom Spinoza explicitly addresses in the *Preface* to the *TTP* is not conceived of as a "fully formed philosopher" but a "would-be philosopher," or a "reader who […] begins their philosophical journey with the view that revelation is a source of knowledge." (See Garber, "Philosophy and Theology"; James, *Philosophy, Reason, and Politics*, 29; and Nadler, *Forged in Hell*, 23.) In this way the purpose of the *TTP* might therefore be construed as attempting to convince the philosopher to give up Scripture and revelation. (See Garber, "Philosophy and Theology" and Strauss, "How to Study.") (It should be noted that while Garber presents this as a possible reading of the *TTP*, he does not endorse it.) E. Curley, on the contrary, interpreted the *TTP* "as a prolegomenon" to the *Ethics* (Curley, "Neglected Masterpiece").

[2] See Steenbakkers, "Textual History" and "Parallel Masterpieces."

My claim is that both these works are part of a single project, at once a theological, political, ethical, and philosophical project that deals with an interconnected series of questions. But one central element dominates all these areas and both of these works: Spinoza's conception of God. The God of the "natural divine law" in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* is the same as the God of the "order and connection" of things and ideas in the *Ethics*.[3] These same ideas also shape Spinoza's views on the foundations of religion, on the principles of ethics, and on the social relations in politics. Spinoza's God is not God the father, good and provident toward his creatures, not the God of transubstantiation or of incarnation, nor is he the God of miracles understood as the suspension of the order and laws of nature. Spinoza's God is not endowed with human characteristics, nor he is the God of revealed religion. Spinoza's God has no freedom of will because this would presuppose a before and after, which would introduce finite temporality into divine action, a concept of duration in time, something inconceivable in God, properly understood. Spinoza's God is instead comprehended as infinite, eternal, unlimited in power, *causa sui*, a God who unfolds in his effects in accordance with an internal logical principle. God is the cause of himself from which everything comes: he is what is manifesting, evolving, expanding, unfolding. True religion for Spinoza is universal religion, "*religio catholica*," catholic in the etymological sense of the term, that is, universal. This religion is summed up in only two imperatives: to love God, and to love your neighbor. These two imperatives are the foundation of Scripture, according to the *TTP*, while at the same time they constitute the ultimate goal of the *Ethics*, the final step in the internalization of divine law, and, at the same time, highest and most authentic self-affirmation.

The idea of love, love of God and consequently love of neighbor, everywhere recommended in the Bible, as Spinoza argues in the *TTP*,[4] comes to us from the knowledge of the profound structure of nature, a structure that arises from an infinite series of interconnected causes and ideas, as we read in the *Ethics*.[5] These relationships and connections constitute the very texture of which the universe is made.

Inserted in the eternal and infinite order of the causes and perfections of God, we attain freedom through the intellectual knowledge that brings with it liberation from the violence of external causes that always threatens us. The *TTP* analyzes some of the ways in which people have expressed their conceptions of God and

[3] Cf. E1a4; E2p7; *TTP* 4 (G III 57–60/C II 125–8).

[4] This is the argument that Spinoza makes in *TTP* 13 (G III 170–1/C II 261–2), citing Jeremiah, Moses (i.e. Exodus), and John.

[5] In the *Ethics*, the intuition of the unity of nature is understood in terms of the connections between things. Substance (God), the central element of the metaphysics of Spinoza, is reflected and expressed in the infinite interconnection of things and ideas. Insofar as everything is an expression of God, the world of the *Ethics* becomes a kind of theology. See particularly, Ep 32, Spinoza to Oldenburg, November 1665 (G IV 169–74/C II 18–20).

the world, and the ability politics has to convey, control, and direct these different conceptions. At the same time, the *TTP* defines and circumscribes the limits that constrain civil sovereigns, and guarantee the freedom which belongs to everyone who lives in society. The *Ethics*, in turn, shows us the way to overcome the sad passions that compromise an active and conscious existence. As long as we are dominated by such passions, we do not have the ability to act, but we are acted on and abandoned to the continuous fluctuation of conflicting passions, especially the fear and hope which dominates us all.[6]

While the project of the two works is similar, the argumentative structures and rhetorical strategies are very different. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza proceeds step by step, following a path in which the implicit translates into the explicit, the *evolutio* into *revelatio*. The revelation of the final part of the *Ethics*, with the final attainment of an intuition of the unity of nature and the freedom of mind, brings us to the intellectual love of God, the last link in the chain, returning us to the beginning, that is, to God, the subject of part I of the *Ethics*. This revelation coincides with what is communicated to us in the Holy Scriptures, if we know how to interpret them in the right way, that is, through the method of interpretation that Spinoza prescribes in chapter 7 of the *TTP*.[7]

It would be wrong to consider the *TTP* as a simple treatise of biblical exegesis, just as it would be equally misleading to consider *Ethics* as a straightforward text in moral philosophy or a text on philosophical anthropology. In the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* and the *Ethics*, Spinoza attempts a general reformulation of religion, ethics, and politics by way of an epistemological journey through the three kinds of knowledge, a journey that begins with the senses and testimony and ends in a full transformation of the self through the knowledge that constitutes intellectual love of God. In this sense, we could say that a continuous striving pervades not only the *TTP* and the *Ethics*, but all of Spinoza's work starting from the *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione* and the *Korte Vernandeling*, striving toward achieving the full knowledge of which we are capable.[8] This complex tangle of approaches and themes, though dealt with differently in the different works, has one and the same goal.

In this essay, I would like to explore some of these themes by exploring some of the terms Spinoza used in developing them. In particular, I would like to look more carefully at the term "Christ," the term "spirit," and the terms "law" and "obedience," and the way in which they connect the two texts.

[6] Cf. E3–E4.

[7] *TTP* 7 (G III 98/C II 171).

[8] The *Ethics* uses the geometrical method (*ordo geometricus*), that is, it establishes its conclusion through rigorous arguments, modelled on Euclidean geometry. But the *TTP* starts from the assumption that "the authority of the Bible depends on the authority of the prophets," that the foundation of theology "cannot be mathematically demonstrated" and cannot be shown "by a mathematical demonstration" (*TTP* 15, G III 185–7/C II 279–80). Steenbakkers has shown that *ordo geometricus* "is the term equivalent to 'method'" and not a simple "exterior form" and that there is a "close link between form and content" in Spinoza's thought. See Steenbakkers, "Geometrical Order," 43.

2. *Spiritus*, *Christus*, and *Spiritus Christi*

The term "spirit" (*spiritus*) occurs often in Spinoza's texts. In the very first chapter of the *TTP* Spinoza discusses at some length the various meanings of the word "*ruagh* (רוח)," Hebrew for spirit.[9] *Spiritus* is also used in the expressions *Spiritus Christi*, *Spiritus Dei*, *Spiritus sanctus*, etc.

The full title of the *TTP*, including its subtitle, contains a virtual recapitulation of the entire content of the text that follows:

> Theological-Political Treatise, containing several discussions showing that the republic can grant freedom of philosophizing without harming its peace or piety, and cannot deny it without destroying its peace and piety. [*TTP*, title page (G III 3/C II 65)]

But the quotation that follows on the title page, a verse from the First Epistle of John, is also very significant, and presages some of the themes that will be of importance not only in the *TTP*, but also in the *Ethics*:

> 1 John 4:13: By this we know that we remain in God and that God remains in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. [*TTP*, title page (G III 3/C II 65)][10]

Of particular relevance here is the term Spirit (*spiritus*) and the expression "he has given us of his Spirit" (*de Spiritu suo*), indicating something shared and something in which we participate. The verse of 1 John that immediately precedes the verse Spinoza quotes is also significant here:

> 1 John 4:12: No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us.

This, together with the verse that follows, draws a connection between *spiritus* (*pneuma*) and "love," because only through love are we able to see God: "No one has ever seen God, yet if we love each other, God remains in us," and only in this way can we enjoy and recognize his "presence" (his *inhabitatio*) in us.

"*Spiritus*" is also connected with knowledge and intellect, through Christ, the Spirit of Christ, and directly through God. The *TTP* alone contains over sixty occurrences of the term "Christ"; the term is also found in Spinoza's letters

[9] *TTP* 1 (G III 21–3/C II 85–6). The transliteration of the Hebrew is Spinoza's, and obviously draws on the Dutch guttural "g." The standard English transliteration would be: "*ruach*."

[10] "*Per hoc cognoscimus, quod in Deo manemus et Deus manet in nobis, quod de Spiritu suo dedit nobis*" (Johann. Epist. I cap. 4 v. 13). The Latin here comes not from the standard *Vulgate*, but from the Latin translation of John Immanuel Tremellius, a translation favored in Calvinist circles. See O III 697n, note 1 on the title page.

and in the *Ethics* in particularly significant contexts.[11] The expression "Jesus Christ" never appears in the *TTP*: Spinoza there speaks only of "Christ." This peculiar circumstance draws attention to the fact that Christ is not just a name, but the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *mashiach* (משיח), the anointed one, the Messiah. The extensive presence of such a word in Spinoza's text raises questions about what it means in the context of his work. When in *Ethics* IV Spinoza refers to the *spiritus Christi*, he establishes a direct equivalence between this expression and the idea of God (*idea Dei*), "on which alone it depends that man should be free and desire for other men the good he desires for himself" [E4p68s (G II 262/C I 585)]. In later correspondence with Henry Oldenburg, Spinoza characterizes Christ as "that eternal son of God, that is, God's eternal wisdom" which has "manifested itself in all things, but most in the human mind."[12] Here the expression "son of God" takes on the meaning of "wisdom" for Spinoza, and Christ ultimately becomes a symbol of knowledge, particularly knowledge of intellect.

In the *KV* I.9, Spinoza advanced the view that motion and intellect are God's immediate modes, each of which is "a Son, product or effect" of God, suggesting that there are "as many 'sons of God' as divine attributes" (G I 48/C I 92). In later texts, Spinoza gives the title of "son of God" to the infinite intellect, for example in Ep 73 ("that eternal son of God, i.e. God's eternal wisdom").[13] Here the "son of God" has manifested itself above all in the human mind. This is repeated later in Ep 76 to Albert Burgh ("in this true Word of God, which is in the mind, and can never be distorted or corrupted")[14] and, above all, in *TTP* 15, where Spinoza writes about "the mind, the true original text of God's word" [*TTP* 15 (G III 182/C II 275)].[15]

In other texts Spinoza also connects Spirit with God. Spinoza's evocation of the idea of God in the *Ethics* (E4p68s) as the source of freedom, love of God, and love of one's neighbor is echoed in the title of the *TTP* itself, where he also makes

[11] Yitzhak Melamed has dedicated a recent article to the interpretation of the expression "*Christus secundum spiritum*" in Spinoza's work, in which he offers an interpretation of this difficult formula in Spinoza's philosophy. See Melamed, "Spinoza, Jesus."

[12] Ep 73, Spinoza to Oldenburg, December 1, 1675, G IV 308/C II 468. For the interpretation of the figure of the "Son of God" in a comparative perspective which identifies some possible channels of dialogue between Judaism and Christianity, see M. Idel, *Sonship*. Perhaps, with reference to λόγος/wisdom (John 1:1) coeternal with God and therefore, not created, but generated ("*ab aeterno ordinata sum*," Proverbs 8:23), Spinoza builds, in the *spiritus Christi*, a real intra-trinitarian connection, in which *Christus* is the center in which everything participates and from which everything comes.

[13] Ep 73, Spinoza to Oldenburg, December 1, 1675, G IV 308/C II 468.

[14] Ep 76, Spinoza to Burgh, end of 1675 or beginning of 1676, G IV 323/C II 477.

[15] See also *KV* I.9 (G I 48/C I 91–2). The expression *Spiritus Christi* recalls Romans 8:9 with reference to the spirit of God who is, dwells, resides in those who have the spirit of Christ (*Vos autem in carne non estis, sed in spiritu: si tamen Spiritus Dei habitat in vobis. Si quis autem Spiritum Christi non habet, hic non est ejus*). Cf. Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, 314; Dagron, *Toland et Leibniz*, 253, n. 2. Dagron also notes that Ep 76 to Burgh is also cited by Wachter, *Elucidarius cabalisticus*, 55, who relates the idea of the Word of God to cabalistic ideas.

reference to the concepts of freedom (*libertas philosophandi*) and peace (*pax*). This alludes directly to the spirit that is the guarantee of freedom and peace, as found Paul's letters to the Corinthians and to the Romans, freedom in *2 Corinthians* 3:17 ("Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty") and peace in Romans 14:17 ("…for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit").[16]

The spirit which Spinoza was invoking when he quoted John on the title page of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* seems not to be the Holy Spirit of Christianity but the spirit of God as sign of our participation in the substance of God and of the possibility that we can participate in the experience of presence and immanence.[17] In chapter 1 of the *TTP*, Spinoza attributes different meanings to the term *ruagh-spiritus*: (1) breadth (*halitus*); (2) air, that is, breathing (*animus sive respiratio*); (3) courage and strength (*animositas et vires*); (4) power and ability (*virtus et aptitudo*); (5) sentiment of the heart (*animi sententia*); (6) mind (*mens*); (7) regions of the world (*mundi plagae*) [*TTP* 1 (G III 21–3/C II 85–6)]. Regarding the fourth group of meanings, will or decision, appetite and impetus, Spinoza refers to the verse of Ezekiel 1:12: "where there was a Spirit (or *a will*) to go, they went."[18] Spinoza seems to refer here to the possibility of living in peace in a framework of freedom of thought. This possibility is within the power of humans because it is within the domain of the figure of mediation (the Son) and therefore of reason.[19] Through *ruagh/spiritus* conceived of as power and ability, we understand (*cognoscimus*) how we fit into God's order of things, that is, to the

[16] See Pesce, *L'esperienza religiosa*, 101. Paul is a constant presence in Spinoza's works and indeed all of Paul's theological vocabulary resounds in Spinoza's language (the fleshy tablets of the heart, the work-law relationship, love as fullness, being in the hands of God like clay in the hands of the potter, etc.). Spinoza considers Paul to be the most philosophical of the New Testament authors, since "none of the Apostles philosophized more" [*TTP* 11 (G III 157/C II 247)]. The *TTP* contains numerous explicit and implicit quotations from Paul's letters. He says, for example, that even when "Paul seems to teach something other than what we have done here," actually "if we attend to the doctrine which Paul mainly wants to teach, we shall find nothing contrary to our doctrine; on the contrary, we shall find that he teaches the same thing we do here" and "so Paul teaches exactly what we require" [*TTP* 3 (G III 54/C II 121)]. Also elsewhere, after expressing his opinion, Spinoza emphasizes that those same things that "we've illustrated […] by many examples" are confirmed "also by the testimony of Paul" [*TTP* 6 (G III 88/C II 160)] furthermore "confirming our conception by the authority of Paul" [*TTP* 16 (G III 198/C II 293)].

[17] Giorgio Agamben has drawn attention to the "extraordinary dialectics" existing in the Letters of Paul between the concepts of "all" and "part," particularly evident in the First Letter to the Corinthians (see Agamben, *Il tempo*, 57): "In Paul, *pas*, 'everything,' is the exact expression of eschatological *telos*. At the end of time, God will be 'all in all,'" *panta en pasin* (1 Corinthians 15:28), according to a formula that would later be repurposed by the pantheists. "There is, then, the part (*meros*), which defines the profane world, the time under the law. Here everything is divided, everything is *ek merous*, 'in part.'" "For we know in part—we can read in 1 Corinthians 13:9–13—and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come [*to téleion*], then that which is in part will be done away. […] For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

[18] *TTP* 1 (G III 22/C II 86).

[19] I draw these considerations from an unpublished paper by G. Lucchesini dedicated to the presence of this subject in Spinoza's work, whom I thank here.

laws of our nature. The reciprocity between the expressions "we remain in God" (*in deo manemus*) and "God remains in us" (*Deus manet in nobis*) displays this intimate connection: it expresses in fact the fullness and at the same time the necessity of this absolute coincidence between our nature and its laws.

In the *Ethics*, the term *spiritus* reappears in the scholium of E4p68, in the expression *Spiritus Christi*. This is the only occurrence of the term in the *Ethics*, but it is a significant one:

> …and then, that, the man having found a wife who agreed completely with his nature, he knew that there could be nothing in Nature more useful to him than she was; but that after he believed the lower animals to be like himself, he immediately began to imitate their affects (see IIIP27) and to lose his freedom; and that afterwards this freedom was recovered by the patriarchs, guided by the Spirit of Christ, that is, by the idea of God, on which alone it depends that man should be free, and desire for other men the good he desires for himself (as we have demonstrated above, by P37). [E4p68s]

We can compare all these quotations, and in particular the last one, with a quote from chapter 1 of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* where *Dei Spiritus* already appears to be equivalent to *mens*:

> And now we won't wonder why Scripture and the Prophets speak so improperly and obscurely concerning the Spirit of God, *or* his mind, as in Numbers 11:17 and 1 Kings 22:2, or why Micaiah saw God sitting [on a throne…], while Daniel saw him as an old man clothed in white garments, and Ezekiel saw him as a fire; or why those who were with Christ saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove, but the Apostles saw it as fiery tongues (*ut linguas igneas*), and finally why Paul, when he first converted, saw a great light (*lucem magnam*). For all these [visions] agree completely with the common ways of imagining God and Spirits. [*TTP* 1 (G III 28–9/C II 92–3)][20]

Those who are with Christ, therefore, see the Holy Spirit descend in the form of a dove (Luke 3:22); the apostles, however, imagine it in the form of tongues of fire, and lastly Paul, on his way to Damascus, sees a light and hears the Christ's voice (Acts 9:3–4). These indications seem to give a sense of spiritual gradation, and appear to identify Christ and the Spirit: for Paul hears Christ, while the followers

[20] We should observe here how Spinoza approaches the phrase "Scripture and the Prophets speak so improperly and obscurely concerning the Spirit of God, *or* his mind." He begins with a number of citations from the Old Testament concerning God (Numbers 11:17, יהוה; 1 Kings 22:19, יהוה; Daniel 7:9, עתיק יומן; Ezekiel 1:4.27–8, יהוה, חשמל), followed by a second group of citations (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32; Acts 2:2–3; 9:3; 22:6) concerning, respectively, the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32; Acts 2:2–3), and Christ (Acts 9:3; 22:6).

of Christ (*qui Christo adherent*) and the apostles see the Spirit. From here we can sketch a geography, in terms of progressive de-spiritualization of the vision of the Spirit: (1) Paul listens to the voice of this mouth (*os*), anchored only to a light coming from above (*lucem magnam*); (2) the apostles identify his gift in a noble element, the fire that tends toward heaven (and tends to identify with it) (*ut lingua igneas*); (3) other witnesses see the Spirit materially, in the form of a dove. But all these perceptions are equally metaphorical: "For all these [visions] agree completely with the common ways of imagining God and Spirits [*vulgaribus de Deo et spiritibus imaginationibus*]" [*TTP* 1 (G III 29/C II 93)].

With such cases from the *TTP* in mind, Spinoza would go on in the *Ethics* to investigate the role of the imagination, distinguishing it from reason and intellect. In *Ethics* V Spinoza insists on intellectual knowledge of the third kind as a condition of the perfection of the mind and as needed to pass (*transitio*) from a state of lesser awareness to a state of greater awareness of himself, God and things: "…the more each of us is able to achieve in this kind of knowledge, the more he is conscious of himself and of God, i.e. the more perfect and blessed he is" (E5p31s). Imagination, in fact, only indicates the present state of the body; as such it indicates something about us only "while the body endures" (*durante corpore*) and in the "present constitution" of our body. Only in intellectual knowledge is the mind called to a further kind of "presence" that can engage the essence of things (E5p34d). In E5p36–8 in particular, the third kind of knowledge is identified with our bliss and freedom. It is love toward God and therefore, in this condition, we fully participate in God: knowledge of the third kind "begets a Love toward a thing immutable and eternal…which we really fully possess…" (*revera sumus compotes*, EVp20s). It is in this state that we are fully in possession of the *spiritus Christi*.

3. Law and Obedience

Further aspects of the close relationship between the *TTP* and the *Ethics* can be understood by considering Spinoza's treatment of law in these two works.

Law is first discussed in the important chapter 4 of the *TTP*, which is devoted to divine law. In *TTP* 4, Spinoza notes that as it is usually understood, law is closely connected with obedience. "Law," he writes, "is generally taken to be a principle of living prescribed to men by the command of others" [*TTP* 4 (G III 59/C II 127)]. When a law is established by those who have the authority to make laws, we are obligated to obey: "obedience consists in someone's carrying out a command solely on the authority of the person who commands it…" [*TTP* 5 (G III 74/C II 144)].[21] But Spinoza returns to the question of the law in *TTP* 16 in

[21] Spinoza goes on to say in this passage that one is not obedient to law in a democracy, because one "does not act from the authority of someone else, but by his own consent."

terms that directly bring to mind the contents of the *Ethics*. The question at issue is natural divine law, the imperative to love our neighbor as ourselves and God above all, and why we should follow it. There he argues that we are supposed to follow it through obedience to God, because God commanded it. This is taken up in the main text. But to this Spinoza later added a note. To follow the natural divine law because it was commanded to God is to act from obedience: "Obedience is concerned with the will of the one commanding, not with the necessity and truth of the matter."[22] But when we understand the rational ground of these divine laws, our conception of them changes, as does the reason why we follow them: the conception of law as a commandment to be obeyed out of hope, fear, and obligation and transforms into acting from reason and from love:

> Moreover, we've shown that the divine laws seem to us to be laws, *or* things instituted, just as long as we do not know their cause. But when this is known, they thereby cease to be laws, and we embrace them not as laws, but as eternal truths. That is, obedience passes into love, which proceeds from true knowledge as necessarily as light does from the sun.[23]

Obedience to law becomes internalized and becomes virtue. The sense of this *virtus* has no psychological or ethical value here, but the term takes on an ontological meaning when Spinoza clarifies that "true virtue" is to "live under the sole guidance of reason," i.e. to exercise and adhere to what is required by our very nature, as full self-realization (E4p38s). In traditional political thought, obedience is generally based on fear and hope: the fear of punishment and the hope for reward. But Spinoza introduces a new model of political obligation. Our obligation to follow the law may be considered not as mere obedience, but as a spontaneous act, motivated by reason itself: law assumes a different meaning in his thought.[24]

Discussion of this theme from the *TTP* is continued in *Ethics* V. There is a gap in *Ethics* V between a first section, which ends with the scholium of prop. 20 and a second section that continues to the end of the work. The first section closes with a statement about our "present life": "With this I have completed everything which concerns this present life." Subsequent propositions are devoted "to those things which pertain to the mind's duration without relation to the body" (E5p20s). Finally, in the last two propositions, Spinoza introduces the distinction between the wise and the ignorant, the *sapiens* and the *ignarus*, between the power that pertains to the person who is conscious of himself and God, and the person who lives without any awareness of themselves, of God or of things, and who "as soon as he ceases to be acted upon, he ceases to be" (E5p42s). The wise person, Spinoza writes, is more powerful than the ignorant: "*sapiens polleat*

[22] *TTP* ADN 34 (G III 264/C II 292–3).
[23] *TTP* ADN 34 (G III 264/C II 293).
[24] In this connection, see Totaro, "Obedience."

potiorque sit ignaro" (E5p42s). But most interesting from our perspective, the *sapiens* lives in a "lawless" dimension, a life unconstrained by law.

In the *Ethics* Spinoza offers a radical critique of the anthropomorphic and providential God of historical religions. And with that, the notion of obedience to God falls as well. In E5p41s, Spinoza returns to the apparent oppositions between obedience and freedom, and between living under a law and living outside law. These contrasts are definitively dissolved in *Ethics* V as the bondage of law and fear of punishment is transformed into the concept of blessedness and intellectual love of God. At the very end of the work, in the final proposition, in fact, Spinoza states that "Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself; nor do we enjoy it because we restrain our lusts; on the contrary, because we enjoy it, we are able to restrain them" (E5p42). Blessedness is therefore understood as a domain in which every obligation to follow law is annulled and with it every reward for its obedience and every penalty for its disobedience. He who has reached this final stage of intellectual development and who has attained the third kind of knowledge has internalized the law in himself, has included it in himself. In a way, we have here not the rejection of the law but its "*perfectio*" in the Latin sense, its completion. In this sense, the conclusion of *Ethics* realizes the final stage of the law, at the same time the destruction of divine law and its wider imposition, the full accomplishment of the law itself.[25]

It seems to me that it is here that the text shows what might be called a "messianic" striving, not in an eschatological or apocalyptic sense, which obviously is not found in Spinoza, but in an actual task in the political life of the citizen, not in some afterlife to come, but in the time of our present life: the time, that is, in which we strive for change, strive to gain power and strive to pass—*transire*—from one condition into another, from one kind of knowledge to another, in this life.[26] This change, which is realized as the instantaneity of the "now," as Walter Benjamin might put it,[27] finds its model application in the concept of law. The

[25] Precisely because of the presence of this particular concept of law Giorgio Agamben believes that the Letters of Paul and the Theses of W. Benjamin can be considered the most important messianic texts in history: cf. Agamben, *Il tempo*, 101. This suggests another variety of messianism, Marxist messianism, which completes the transfer of power by extinguishing the state, or the instrument of power itself.

[26] By reconfiguring the themes proposed in the two works, Spinoza applies to theology in a different way a concept that it itself already contained, that is, messianism. Spinoza's messianism is a messianism completely secularized, in which the "messianic" does not indicate the chronological end of time, an afterlife beyond this life, but an eternally present time in need of fulfillment.

[27] Walter Benjamin spoke of instantaneity as the "time filled by the presence of the now" (*Jetztzeit*) which makes visible the constellation in which the present is "a well-defined earlier epoch":

> Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It becomes historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the 'time of the now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time. [Benjamin, "Theses," 255]

wise man obeys the law not because it is written but because it is rational, that is, consonant with the structure of nature.

The analysis of the term "law" that Spinoza develops in the theological section of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* as universal divine law and in the political section as right (*jus*) and positive law ends in the *Ethics* in the definition of a domain where law is overcome: the wise man doesn't need law, and for him, the law is not useful because he knows from reason what he should do.[28] Spinoza thus detaches *pietas* (piety) and law as well as fracturing the connection between religion and law. This fracture does not imply a conflict between different powers: law simply dissolves into piety and religion. In this way, the verse from 1 *John* quoted on the title page of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* completely corresponds to what Spinoza concludes in *Ethics* V: "From this we clearly understand wherein our salvation, or blessedness, or freedom, consists, viz. in a constant and eternal Love of God, or in God's Love for men" (E5p36s). This love is made real and completed by the mind's activity, insofar as with the third kind of knowledge the human mind is no longer passive: its intellectual love of God is "an action by which the mind contemplates itself, with the accompanying idea of God as its cause" (E5p36d), "that is, the mind's intellectual love of God is part of the infinite love by which God loves himself" (E5p36). Intuitive knowledge, or knowledge of the third kind, along with universal or the second kind of knowledge, allows us to suffer as little as possible from bad (that is passive) affects, and allows us to fear death hardly at all (E5p39s). It does not eliminate our affections and does not erase our fear of death altogether, but it changes our relationship with the world, intervening and modifying our presence and our stay in the world and establishing the sense of our lives and our death, of our lives and our eternity.

It is no coincidence that in these passages from *Ethics* V, yet another term found prominently in the quotation from 1 John on the title page returns with particular insistence.[29] This is the word *remanere*, *manere*, to stay. On the title page of the *Treatise* we read that "we remain in God and God remains in us" (*In Deo manemus et Deus manet in nobis*). In the E5p38d we read that the more the mind knows with the second and the third kind of knowledge, the more that most of it "remains" ("the greater the part of it that remains," *major ejus pars remanet*). That greater part of the mind that remains is that which God has given us of his spirit (*de spiritu suo*) and from which we know that "we remain in God and God in us." Again, the more the mind understands things through the second

[28] According to Spinoza, in fact, the *Respublica Hebraeorum* and/or Amsterdam are not a goal, a destiny, an ambition to realize, but only examples of "good functioning," documented (Jerusalem) or experientially (Amsterdam). And in fact, for Spinoza, the distinction between mechanical obedience and love dictated by wisdom is only pragmatic: the learned person is a good *civis* because he understands the "reasons for love," the vulgar because it is trained to be so (and because it knows how to recognize in it its material advantage).

[29] 1 John 4:13. It is difficult to determine the meaning of "*manere/meno*" in this verse. Here I am only offering a suggestion that does not claim to be a rigorous philological interpretation.

and third kind of knowledge, "the greater the part of it that remains unharmed" (*eo major ejus pars illaesa manet*). The part of the mind that remains "unharmed" is the intellect. It is in this condition that the reciprocity of God's presence in us and us in God remains, dwells, a relationship of identity that transforms transcendence into immanence. That part of the mind that is passive and that dies is not important ("*nullius sit momenti*") with respect to the part that "remains" ("*quod ipsius remanet*") (E5p38s).[30] That part of the mind which remains has a sense of completeness (*perfectio*), as E5p40c repeats: "…the part of the mind that remains, however great it is, is more perfect than the rest." Here the "rest," the "remnant," that is the part that "remains" ("pars Mentis […] quae *remanet*"), makes us capable of acting: it acts and is not acted upon. It is the guarantee of our redemption from slavery of the law, intended as an external imposition or obligation, and its replacement by that law inscribed in the minds of human beings, the foundation of our freedom.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have emphasized some of the philosophical concerns that unite the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* and the *Ethics* into one program. But there is much more to say on this theme.

From the *TTP* to the *Ethics*, the concept of law as system of obligations, applied to a global conception of nature-God—law as natural law, as connections and relationships in the order of causes—is embedded in a reflection on the human condition, passing from the plan of the universe to everyday particulars. The passage from geometric order to the human sphere implies the transformation of the law from a system of universal relations to the personal experience of us as individual human beings and the collective experience of groups. This process, which results from the transposition of propositions demonstrated with mathematical certainty into norms of behavior and practical life, translates the eternal order of

[30] For this concept of "remaining," see also Spinoza's letter to Burgh (Ep 76, Spinoza to Burgh, end of 1675 or beginning of 1676, G IV 323/C II 474). The particular use of the verb *tangere* in this context should also be underlined in the phrase "*eo major ejus pars non tangitur ab affectibus*": if the mind knows with the second and third kinds of knowledge, the greater part of its intellect will not be "touched" by the affects (E5p38d). Similarly, that part of the mind that is not "touched" (because it knows with the third kind of knowledge) will not suffer death ("*mors eo minus est noxia, quo Mentis clara, & distincta cognitio major est, & consequenter, quo Mens magis Deum amat*," E5p38s) and will not die with the body ("*cum corpore perire*," E5p38s). The expression "*non tangitur*," inserted in the context of a discourse on what does not die, on "staying" and on "not perishing *cum corpore*," recalls the words "*noli me tangere*," the words that, in the John 20:17, the risen Jesus addresses Mary Magdalene. The Gospel phrase continues: in fact "I have not yet gone up to my Father" ("*nondum enim ascendi ad Patrem meum*"). This phrase is interpreted as exhortation of Jesus to the Magdalene not to investigate, touching him, if after the resurrection he still had a real body since, having not yet ascended to the Father, his body could not be real.

the cosmos to the more limited domain of religion while retaining its universality. In both the *TTP* and the *Ethics*, Spinoza insists on the need to set aside those "decrees" ("*decreta*") that they call "traditions of [our] forefathers" ("*traditiones patrum*") and to follow and apply only those that advance our persistence in existence and flourishing.[31] In this sense, the important digression in E4p37s against the ban on killing and eating the meat of animals assumes a particular meaning. But more important still is the attention to the concept of "*utilitas*," the personal advantage we should pursue. Only practice and *utilitas* in this sense, in fact, have universal value for Spinoza, in addition to the moral content of the Bible. In this sense, the passage to a greater perfection directly enhances the social and political life of individuals and ensures the proper functioning and well-being of the community. The well-being of the community basically requires practical types of behavior: to love God and to love your neighbor, to do good, and to be willing to forgive others' offences. The knowledge of divine law thus becomes a domain for speculating not only about the universal order of causes, but also for understanding realm of everyday life, as a guide for our soul and the laws that govern our existence and our coexistence.

With the arrival at the concept of wisdom (*sapientia*) understood in terms of rational and intuitive understanding at the very end of the *Ethics*, in E5p42s, Spinoza's "messianic" striving attains its goal "in the transition to a greater perfection" ("*in transitione ad majorem perfectionem*") and in the transition from joy (*laetitia*) to blessedness (*beatitudo*).[32] With this we see the ultimate bond between *TTP* and *Ethics*. *Ethics* is a philosophy of *substantia*, but one from which follow strong theological-political consequences. And the *TTP* is a work on theology and politics, but grounded in a radical conception of God as substance. Such philosophy is based on the idea of the *spiritus* as mind and of the mind as a sign, as a seal and compact (*syngraphum*) establishing the presence of God in men, as "an image of his divinity," as "God's eternal wisdom" which "has manifested itself in all things, but most in the human mind."[33]

In the last years of the philosopher's life, Henry Oldenburg reiterated a criticism that would be made against Spinoza by later interpreters.[34] Like Oldenburg, these interpreters could not grasp the true meaning of an *ethos* (ethics) that considers the sound functioning of social and political reality as being on a par with physical reality, one that follows the same laws of physics and psychology. In this

[31] *TTP* 18 (G III 223/C II 325).

[32] "As we are affected with a greater joy, we pass to a greater perfection, and consequently participate more in the divine nature" [E4app cap. 31 (G II 275/C I 593)]; "If joy, then, consists in the passage to a greater perfection, blessedness must surely consist in the fact that the mind is endowed with perfection itself" (E5p33d).

[33] *TTP* 12 (G III 158/C II 248) and Ep 73, Spinoza to Oldenburg, December 1, 1675 (G IV 308/C II 468).

[34] Ep 71, Oldenburg to Spinoza, November 15, 1675 (G IV 304/C II 464–5); and Ep 73, Spinoza to Oldenburg, December 1, 1675 (G IV 307–9/C II 467–8).

framework, the figure and the spirit of Christ show how the political and social machinery function and their perfect adaptation to reality as it really exists, as the wise man understands reality, through knowledge of the third kind. In this sense, interpretation of the Scriptures advanced in the *TTP* and the definition of the concept of salvation in the *Ethics* correspond in Spinoza to a (descriptive) syntax instead of a (prescriptive) grammar of history: salvation is something we can attain in this world, not something to expect in a life to come. It is no coincidence that the *TTP* develops along an exegetical-religious dimension and concludes with a scenario in the domain of politics, something in the present time, in the time of "now."

In the time of "now," in our present life, the Kingdom of God (*regnum dei*) is made real in a conception of knowledge and salvation that is the sign of our participation in the divine nature and of our adherence to that love-wisdom which results in freedom and peace of mind as well as in an excellent *respublica* and in common coexistence.

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3

Spinoza's *Ethics* as a Theological-Political Treatise

Steven Nadler

It is obvious to any reader who makes it through at least Part 4 of Spinoza's *Ethics* that, on top of its metaphysical, epistemological, psychological, and moral elements, the work also has a significant political dimension. One need only look at E4p37, and especially its long second scholium, to recognize that Spinoza's account of human nature and the conclusions about reason and virtue that follow from it engender, in his mind, a particular theory of the origins of political society, the nature of justice and the grounds of obligation to the state. These political remarks, with their unmistakable Hobbesian overtones, were no doubt added to the original three-part composition that Spinoza had put aside in 1665 to work on the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (*TTP*) only after he had had occasion to read *De Cive* (published in 1642, a copy of which he owned) and *Leviathan*, the latter in either its 1667 Dutch or 1668 Latin edition.[1]

But it is one thing for a work to be a political treatise, and quite another for it to be a theological-political treatise. Not every instance of the former is also an instance of the latter. John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, for example, as well as Spinoza's own *Tractatus politicus* are arguably straightforward political works, while Hobbes's *Leviathan*, John Milton's *Areopagitica* and, of course, Spinoza's *TTP* are stunning examples of treatises that fall under both categories. For among the many topics these latter works address is the vexed question of what ought to be the proper relationship between religious authority and the civil sovereign, between Church and State.

I argue, however, that while the *Ethics* is obviously a work with political dimensions—and those all-too-brief remarks in E4p37s1–2 receive detailed elaboration in the latter chapters of the *TTP* and in the *Tractatus politicus*—it is also undeniably a theological-political treatise. And I suggest it is a theological-political treatise not because of the explicitly political themes in those propositions of Part 4, but, oddly enough, because of Spinoza's metaphysics, and especially his metaphysics of human nature. More specifically, I argue that Spinoza's

[1] For studies of Hobbes and Spinoza, see Curley, "State of Nature"; Malcolm, "Hobbes and Spinoza"; and Sacksteder, "How Much of Hobbes."

notoriously and frustratingly opaque account of the eternity of the mind in Part 5, accompanied by his unorthodox re-conception of the notions of 'blessedness' and 'salvation,' not only constitute a crucially important dimension of the *Ethics* that has been too quickly dismissed as "worthless,"[2] but also contribute to making it a theological-political work. However, recognizing this requires considering the relationship of the *Ethics* to the very historically grounded *TTP* that Spinoza published (anonymously) in 1670. My thesis—and it should not be a surprising one, given how systematic a thinker Spinoza is—is that the mind-body metaphysics of the *Ethics* and the religious and political doctrines of the *TTP* are complementary and mutually supporting parts of the same theological-political project.

1. The Theological-Political Question: The Dutch Context

Let me begin by clarifying what I mean by a "theological-political treatise". The seventeenth century witnessed a good deal of theoretical attention paid to the role of religion in political society. In the competition between civil and religious authority for state power, as well as for the hearts and minds (and bodies) of the people, thinkers such as Hugo Grotius, Hobbes, Milton, Pieter and Johan de la Court, and, of course, Spinoza raised the question as to what ought to be the proper relationship between the theological and the political.[3] Should the political be subservient to the theological, with a nation ultimately governed by its clerics and its laws restricted, even commanded by theological principles? Or, on the other hand, should a polity's religious life, like its other aspects, be controlled by the secular authorities? Should the church rule the state or the state rule the church? Or, in fact, should one have nothing whatsoever to do with the other?

The theological-political question was particularly acute in a nation like the United Provinces of the Netherlands (the Dutch Republic), a new nation whose birth occurred in a time of heavy religious warfare. Having only recently liberated itself from Spain's Catholic rule, the seven Reformed (Calvinist) provinces of the northern Low Countries not only continued to debate what form of government would be best for them but also had to decide what was going to be the place of religion in their society. Article thirteen of the Union of Utrecht (1579), which served as a kind of founding constitution for the Dutch Republic, explicitly stated that "each individual enjoys freedom of religion, and no one is persecuted or questioned about his religion."[4] By the mid-seventeenth century, and especially in

[2] Bennett, *A Study*, 372.

[3] In addition to Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) and Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644), there are the *Consideratien van staet* (1660) and the *Politike discoursen* (1662) by the De la Court brothers (although they may have been written mainly by Johan), and Grotius' *De imperio summarum potestatum circa sacra* (1647).

[4] Kossman and Mellink, *Revolt of the Netherlands*, 170.

the more liberal cities such as Amsterdam and Haarlem, Catholics, Jews, and other minority religious groups (such as Lutherans) were allowed to worship freely—if not always openly, then at least with an understanding wink and without the kind of persecution that minority religions suffered elsewhere in Europe. The myth of the Dutch Golden Age as an era of openness for all faiths may be an exaggeration, but it is nonetheless true that the Republic was an unusual model of religious toleration in the period.[5] Still, the Reformed Church dominated Dutch life. It enjoyed enormous advantages and protection over other confessions, and constituted the Republic's privileged (if not established) denomination. Public worship, as well as public office, was for a long time limited to its members.

The problem—a very concrete political problem that occasioned Spinoza to put aside the *Ethics* to write the *TTP*—is that by the latter half of the 1660s, the Reformed Church was exercising more and more influence in the political and civic realms. To Spinoza and like-minded thinkers, this was definitely not a good development. The Church was effectively working to undermine the relatively liberal politics, secular culture, and principles of toleration that characterized Holland and other provinces during the decades of the "True Freedom." This was the first stadholderless period that began in 1650 under the leadership of Johan de Witt, and it would last until 1672, when De Witt and his partisans were violently overthrown by the Orangist (stadholder) camp and their ecclesiastic allies, who then installed William III as stadholder. In a letter to Oldenburg, Spinoza lays out the reasons for "writing a treatise on my views regarding Scripture"—that is, the *TTP*. He says that these include combating "the prejudices of the theologians" and defending "the freedom of philosophizing and saying what we think," since "the preachers suppress it as much as they can with their excessive authority and aggressiveness" [Ep 30, Spinoza to Oldenburg, September 1665 (G IV 166/C II 14–15)].

What worried Spinoza was not just that these conservative Reformed preachers were influencing national and international policy (including military strategy) and even (in some towns) essentially dictating local government. They were also striving to impose their rigid, highly sectarian religious, social, and ethical mores upon civil society and thereby deleteriously affecting the everyday lives—and especially the freedom—of ordinary citizens.[6] The conservative pastors known as "Voetians"—so-called because they were inspired by Gisbertus Voetius, the firebrand rector of the University of Utrecht—were chafing against the limitations that the more liberal regents of the States of Holland sought to impose upon their authority. The orthodox ecclesiastics decried the lack of "godliness" and moral fiber in everyday lifestyles, as well as the lax observance of the Sabbath.

[5] See Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, ch. 27. See also the essays in Hsia and Van Nierop, *Calvinism and Religious Toleration*.

[6] On these developments during the 1660s, see Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 637–784.

The Lord's day, they argued, was for rest and prayer, not ice-skating parties along the rivers.[7] The urging for the reinstatement of a stadholder from the House of Orange was strong within this segment of the church, which expected such a leader to be sympathetic to its socio-religious aims and willing to work against the liberal States of Holland and the overly tolerant (and therefore theologically suspect) regents who controlled it.

2. Spinoza's Theological-Political Project

Spinoza's *TTP*—with its extended argument that the separation of philosophy and religion, reason and faith, politics and piety is essential for the well-being of the state—is directed at this attempted appropriation of political, social, and moral authority by the clergy. In Spinoza's view, the solution to the theological-political problem is to undercut the influence of ecclesiastics over the mechanisms of the state and especially over people's minds. To counter this nefarious tendency, Spinoza must do some serious debunking of dogmatic pillars of the religious establishment. If the preachers' power over politics and persons derives its sustenance from the superstitious beliefs that they find and encourage in people, then the most effective strategy to counter that power is to cut it off at its source by undermining those superstitious beliefs themselves. Spinoza needs to refute or at least illuminate the true meaning of those fundamental notions that are manipulated by ecclesiastics to gain influence over public and private lives. Thus, the deflation of prophecy to the product of vivid imagination by ethically superb individuals (chapters 1–2); the denial of the possibility of miracles (chapter 6); and especially the de-sacralization of the Bible, the book wielded by preachers to reinforce their prerogative, and its reduction to a "mutilated" work of human literature whose "divinity" consists only its capacity to morally edify readers and inspire them to virtuous action (chapters 7–13)—all these elements of the *TTP* are geared toward weakening the authority of the ecclesiastics and reducing the influence they have over people's beliefs and behaviors.

To see how this is supposed to work, let us first consider those superstitious beliefs. In the preface to the *TTP*, Spinoza offers a kind of natural history of religion. As Spinoza sees it, our natural response in the face of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune is superstition. As long as things are going well, we are content to rely on our own resources; a person who is satisfied with his lot does not generally seek supernatural aid, or even the help of other mortals. "If men could manage all their affairs by a definite plan, or if fortune were always favorable to them, no one would be in the grip of superstition." But once their hopes are

[7] On the controversies involving the Voetians and their opponents, see Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 660–9; and Touber, *Biblical Philology*, ch. 5.

dashed and their fears realized, as they are "in such a tight spot that they cannot decide on any plan," they quickly turn to certain modes of behavior calculated to reverse the course of events and make things go their way again:

> When they are prospering, even if they are quite inexperienced, they are generally so full of their own wisdom that they think themselves wronged if anyone wants to give them advice—whereas in adversity they do not know where to turn, and beg for advice from everyone. They hear no advice so foolish, so absurd or groundless, that they do not follow it.

To those down on their luck or afraid of what lies ahead, the most trivial occurrences will appear as harbingers of good or bad fortune, while unusual phenomena will be taken to reveal the beneficent or malevolent will of the deities. "They invent countless things and interpret nature in amazing ways, as if the whole of nature were as crazy as they are." The course of events as directed by hidden powers appears to such individuals as something that they can, with a little effort, manipulate, and they will even regard it as pious to do so. They thus offer sacrifices to avert impending disaster and make vows that they hope will bring back whatever goods they have lost. As Spinoza says, "the reason why superstition arises, lasts, and increases, is fear." It is fear that is the origin of "illusory religion" [All of the quotations are taken from *TTP*, Preface (G III 5–6/C II 65–7)].

But fear and hope are very unstable emotions. Thus, the superstitions grounded in them are inconstant and variable. As soon as things start going well again, a person will typically cease those practices that they had believed would bring better circumstances in their train. Those who have the most to gain from the continuation of such superstitious behavior—diviners, soothsayers, priests—therefore take great pains to stabilize them and give them some permanence. They do this primarily by exaggerating the importance of these activities and surrounding them in impressive and dignified ceremonies. This will insure that, even when things are going well, people will continue to pay due respect to the gods and, more importantly, to their earthly ministers. The result is organized sectarian religion:

> This inconstancy [in superstitious practices] has been the cause of many uprisings and bloody wars.…As Curtius aptly noted, "Nothing governs the multitude more effectively than superstition." That is why they are easily led, under the pretext of religion, now to worship their Kings as Gods, now to curse and loathe them as the common plague of the human race. To avoid this evil [of inconstancy], immense zeal is brought to bear to embellish religion—whether the religion is true or illusory—with ceremony and pomp, so that it will be thought to have greater weight than any other influence, and so that everyone will always worship it with the utmost deference. [*TTP*, Preface (G III 6–7/C II 68)]

For the adherents of these codified superstitions, life is a state of "bondage," coerced obedience in body and in mind. They live in a state of "deception" and are prevented (sometimes by force) from exercising free judgment. True worship has been replaced by flattery of God, the pursuit of knowledge by servitude to false dogma, and freedom of thought and action by persecution against heterodoxy and non-believers.

> Piety—O immortal God!—and Religion consist in absurd mysteries, and those who disdain reason completely, and reject and shun the intellect as corrupt by nature—this is what is most unfair—they are the ones who are thought to have the divine light. [*TTP*, Preface (G III 8–9/C II 70–1)]

On Spinoza's account, behind the major organized religions and their power over people lies a certain convenient but ultimately irreverent and harmful conception of God. The superstitious rites and ceremonies of Judaism and Christianity, calculated to win God's favor and avoid His wrath, rest on the false assumption that God is very much a rational agent, endowed as we are with a psychological life and moral character. God is, in other words, supposed to be a kind of person, possessed of intelligence, will, desire, and even emotion. The Abrahamic deity is a merciful, wise, and just God, a transcendent providential being who has purposes and expectations, makes commands and judgments, and is capable of great acts of forgiveness and vengeance.

It is precisely this traditional religious picture of God that Spinoza, in the *Ethics*, rejects as foolish anthropomorphism. In E1p15s1, he inveighs against "those who feign a God, like man, consisting of a body and a mind, and subject to passions. But how far they wander from the true knowledge of God, is sufficiently established by what has already been demonstrated" [E1p15s1 (G II 57/C I 421)]. Having established that Nature is an indivisible, infinite, self-caused, substantial whole—in fact, the *only* substantial whole; that outside of Nature there is nothing; and that everything that exists is a part of Nature and is brought into being by and within Nature with a deterministic necessity through Nature's laws, Spinoza concludes that God and Nature—the substantial, unique, unified, active, infinitely powerful, necessary cause of everything—are one and the same thing.

When Spinoza draws out the religious implications of this metaphysical theology in the subsequent propositions of the *Ethics*, it becomes clear that his *Deus sive Natura* is totally unsuitable for the role that the Abrahamic deity is ordinarily called upon to play. Because of the necessity inherent in Nature, there are no purposes for or within the universe, outside of the projects that human beings may set for themselves. God or Nature does not act for any ends, and things within nature are not created for the sake of anything. God or Nature does not *do* things to achieve any goals. The order of things just follows from God's (Nature's)

attributes with necessity. All talk of God's intentions, preferences or aims is just a pernicious fiction:

> All the prejudices I here undertake to expose depend on this one: that men commonly suppose that all natural things act, as men do, on account of an end; indeed, they maintain as certain that God himself directs all things to some certain end, for they say that God has made all things for man, and man that he might worship God. [E1app (G II 78/C I 439–40)]

God is not some goal-oriented planner who then judges things by how well they conform to his purposes. Things happen only because of Nature and its laws. "Nature has no end set before it …. All things proceed by a certain eternal necessity of nature" [E1app (G II 80/C I 442)]. To believe otherwise is precisely what leads to those superstitions that are so easily manipulated by preachers and rabbis:

> [People] find—both in themselves and outside themselves—many means that are very helpful in seeking their own advantage, e.g. eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing, plants and animals for food, the sun for light, the sea for supporting fish …. Hence, they consider all natural things as means to their own advantage. And knowing that they had found these means, not provided them for themselves, they had reason to believe that there was someone else who had prepared those means for their use. For after they considered things as means, they could not believe that the things had made themselves; but from the means they were accustomed to prepare for themselves, they had to infer that there was a ruler, or a number of rulers of nature, endowed with human freedom, who had taken care of all things for them, and made all things for their use. And since they had never heard anything about the temperament of these rulers, they had to judge it from their own. Hence, they maintained that the Gods direct all things for the use of men in order to bind men to them and be held by men in the highest honor. So it has happened that each of them has thought up from his own temperament different ways of worshipping God, so that God might love them above all the rest, and direct the whole of Nature according to the needs of their blind desire and insatiable greed. Thus this prejudice was changed into superstition, and struck deep roots in their minds. [E1app (G II 78–9/C I 440–1)]

Already, then, we can see one important respect in which the *Ethics* relates to the theological-political project of the *TTP*. By substituting the true concept of God for the anthropomorphic and providential one of the preachers and rabbis, Spinoza seeks to undermine some of the superstitious beliefs that are grounded in that false representation of the divine and that allow those ecclesiastics to manipulate the hearts and minds of the people and gain not just moral power but political power as well.

Another metaphysical element of the *Ethics* that contributes to the theological-political project is the absolute necessity that, according to Spinoza, governs Nature and all its phenomena. Everything, he claims, follows "from the necessity of the divine nature" [E1p16]; "all things have necessarily flowed, or always follow, by the same necessity and in the same way as from the nature of a triangle it follows, from eternity to eternity, that its three angles are equal to two right angles" [E1p17s1]. But if, as Spinoza demonstrates, "in nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way" [E1p29], then any divine interruptions or violations of the law-like course of nature are thereby ruled out in principle. In other words, miracles are impossible, and the belief in them grounded in ignorance. And if miracles are evidence of God's providence, of a divine plan to which the preachers have privileged access, then Spinoza thereby removes another weapon from their arsenal. Spinoza is clearly aware of the dangerous position he is taking here: "One who seeks the true causes of miracles, and is eager, like an educated man, to understand natural things, not to wonder at them, like a fool, is generally considered and denounced as an impious heretic by those whom the people honor as interpreters of nature and the Gods" [E1app (G II 81/C I 443)].

Thus, we have here in Part One of the *Ethics*, with the revisionist conception of God and the necessity governing all things, two elements of Spinoza's metaphysics that clearly contribute to his overall theological-political project, each by undermining in its own way superstitious beliefs that buttress the authority of the ecclesiastic class. But these are easily picked, low-hanging fruit, since it is fairly obvious how the God of the *Ethics* and the necessity of nature inform the *TTP*. We need only look at the discussion of divine providence in chapter 3 of the *TTP*, where Spinoza claims that "God's decrees and commands, and consequently his providence, are really nothing but the order of nature" [TTP 3 (G III 89/C II 160)]. And then there is the expanded analysis of miracles in chapter 6, which dovetails nicely with the doctrines of the *Ethics*.

3. Immortality as a Theological-Political Problem

However, there is more to the relationship between the *Ethics* and the *TTP* than Spinoza's conception of "God or Nature" and the political discourse of E4p37s. In fact, considering the two works together can help us make sense of what is one of the most notoriously difficult doctrines of the *Ethics*—the doctrine of the eternity of the mind, presented in Part 5. By the same token, a failure to consider the theological-political context of the *Ethics* and its relationship to the *TTP* can lead one to fail to grasp the significance of, and even too hastily dismiss, Spinoza's discussion of "those things which pertain to the mind's duration without relation to the body" [E5p20s].

Consider, for example, Jonathan Bennett's well-known claim that the second half of Part 5 of the *Ethics* is "pretty certainly worthless," "rubbish which causes others to write rubbish," and "an unmitigated and seemingly unmotivated disaster."[8] I note, however, that Bennett also begins his book by saying that "I do not find [Spinoza's two works on politics] helpful in understanding the *Ethics*."[9] In my view, these two sets of remarks are closely related, since Bennett's refusal to place the *Ethics* in its broader theological-political context may be exactly what is keeping him from being able properly to understand what is going on with the eternity of the mind doctrine.

I assume that what Bennett thinks is "unmotivated" is not so much disaster per se, but the propositions concerning the mind's eternity. And yet, the motivation behind these propositions is precisely the same motivation that is behind Spinoza's anti-anthropomorphic conception of God and the denial of miracles—namely, a theological-political project whose goal is to undermine the superstitious beliefs that nourish the power that ecclesiastics have over people's lives and public policy. Let us see how this is so.

The propositions on the eternity of the mind in Part 5 constitute the core of Spinoza's assault on the religious doctrine of the immortality of the soul and on the eschatological beliefs that accompany it. On his account, there is no robust or meaningful sense in which human beings enjoy personal immortality or an afterlife in some world-to-come. Since I have argued for this at length elsewhere,[10] let me here simply summarize what I take to be the salient facts about Spinoza's account of the eternity of the mind.

In E5p23, Spinoza notes that "the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the [human] body, but something of it remains which is eternal." The formal essence of the human mind, and its essential core during its durational existence, is the idea of the formal essence of the human body. This idea is an eternal idea in the infinite intellect under the attribute of Thought, corresponding to the eternal formal essence of the body under the attribute of Extension. It is nothing but a knowledge of the human body *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Now the human mind enjoys actual durational existence when the formal essence of the human body is instantiated with an actual durational existence (E2p11, E5p23c). During that durational existence, the human mind acquires, on top of its essential core idea, many sensory and imaginative ideas that reflect the affections of the body as it interacts other bodies. But when the body comes to its durational end, those sensory and imaginative ideas come to an end as well. What is left, after death, is simply the eternal idea of the essence of the body. But notice that what is true of the human mind and body is true of *everything* in nature: the eternal idea of the eternal formal essence of a body is there both before and after

[8] Bennett, *A Study*, 372, 374, 357. [9] Bennett, *A Study*, 7. [10] Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy*.

the durational existence of that body, whether we are talking about human beings, giraffes, or trees. It is nothing that human beings can take pride or comfort in.

In E5p38, however, Spinoza adds that the more knowledge of the second and third kinds that the mind acquires in this lifetime, "the greater the part of it that remains" after death. This is because the true and adequate ideas constituting the second and third kinds of knowledge are, like the idea of the formal essence of the body, eternal. During this lifetime, these adequate ideas make up a subset of the ideas of the knower's mind, and to this extent the knower participates in eternity. The more true and adequate ideas a person acquires in this life—the more true knowledge she possesses—the greater is the part of the mind that is constituted by them and thus the more that mind participates in eternity. As Spinoza notes, "we feel and know by experience that we are eternal" (E5p23s). But once the knower's durational life comes to an end, all that remains are these eternal ideas—that is, that part of the mind that is eternal. Spinoza does say that "the eternal part of the mind is the intellect" (E5p40c). But what he means is not the intellect as some personal faculty. "The essence of our mind consists only in knowledge," Spinoza claims (E5p36s). The intellect is simply a collection of ideas—or, more precisely, the idea of the formal essence of the human body, along with whatever other true and adequate ideas have been acquired in this lifetime—and that is all that remains.

This is not a doctrine of the immortality of the soul, at least not in any religiously or spiritually meaningful sense. There is nothing personal about what remains eternally of the mind. It may be that the body whose formal essence is the object of the idea that is the essential core of the mind individuates that eternal idea from other eternal ideas, but it certainly is not an extension of my self in this lifetime. There is no continuity within consciousness, since there is no memory; Spinoza explicitly ties memory to the durational existence of the body (E5p21). In fact, the eternal part of the mind does not constitute a conscious self at all—it is simply a body of eternal ideas.

In other words, for Spinoza there is no personal immortality, no afterlife. There is no eternal fate to be hoped for or feared. When you are dead, you are dead.

Part of Bennett's trouble with Part 5 of the *Ethics* is that he believes that Spinoza is in fact trying to defend a doctrine of personality immortality, and he just cannot see how or why he would do so. He surmises that, by the time he reached the end of the *Ethics*, Spinoza must have become "terrified of extinction."[11] But for Spinoza to be interested in defending true immortality would be totally

[11] Bennett, *A Study*, 375. Similarly, Matheron ("Immortality of the Soul," 304) sees a doctrine of "immortality" (and not just eternity) in Spinoza's account, and adds that "it may seem regrettable, admittedly, that Spinoza included this doctrine of immortality in his system, and one could certainly wonder about his reasons for this insertion." Wolfson (*The Philosophy of Spinoza*, ch. 20), too, sees Spinoza as trying to defend a traditional doctrine of immortality.

contrary to his overall project of freedom—not just personal freedom but political freedom as well. That is, it would be contrary to his theological-political mission.

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul may in fact be the most pernicious of all the superstitious ideas that religious authorities encourage in their followers. The belief in an immortal self leads inexorably to a life governed by the passions of hope and fear: hope for eternal reward and fear of eternal punishment. These emotions about the fate of one's soul in some world-to-come will be extremely strong and will dominate our affective lives. A person will do anything—anything!—to earn that divine reward and avoid that divine punishment. Meanwhile, preachers and rabbis say that they know precisely what one needs to do to achieve the desired eternal outcome. The result of this combustible combination of desperation among ordinary folks, superstitious beliefs, and deception perpetrated by ministers is uncritical obedience, even servility by the former to the latter. People throw themselves at the mercy of clerical authorities and allow them to dictate their behavior and run their lives and even their polity. The upshot is not only psychological bondage to the passions, where desire is guided not by reason but by the emotions of hope and fear, but a social and political bondage as well. Moses Mendelssohn seems to be expressing this same insight when he says that the "inadmissible idea of the eternality of punishment in hell" is "an idea the abuse of which has made not many fewer men truly miserable in this life than it renders, in theory, unhappy in the next."[12]

Spinoza's point is that there is no afterlife, there are no eternal rewards or punishments. Virtue does indeed have its rewards, but they are entirely in this durational life and they are perfectly natural: happiness, equanimity in the face of fortune, and "true peace of mind" (E5p40s). A person who sees things through reason or intellect, and who thereby knows the necessity that governs all things in nature, including his/her own mental life, will experience a weakening of the passions and a greater degree of activeness, freedom, and self-control. As for "blessedness" and "salvation," these consist not in our selection for assumption to another realm, but simply in the intellectual love of God and the joy that cognitive condition represents in the here and now (E5p40).

What Spinoza is up to in the latter half of Part 5, then, is a refutation of a powerful superstitious belief that is the foundation of the personal and public bondage that keeps us from lives of freedom. By undermining the belief in immortality, he is undercutting the influence that, he fears, the Dutch preachers—and, more generally, priests, pastors, rabbis, and other ecclesiastics—are increasingly exercising over mind and polity.[13] This part of the *Ethics*, in other words, like the

[12] Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, 123.

[13] Hobbes suggests that his rejection of "Separated Essences", such as an "Incorporeall Spirit" or immaterial soul, plays a similar theologico-political role in *Leviathan*, where he claims to argue for "nothing but what is necessary to the doctrine of Government and Obedience." As he sees it, the notion of an incorporeal soul that is distinct from the body (and, presumably, that would survive the

metaphysical theology of Part 1, plays an important role in his theological-political project.

4. Conclusion

Despite efforts by some scholars to treat the *Ethics* and the *Theological-Political Treatise* as only tangentially related works, even going so far as to ignore one in dealing with the other, the two treatises are essentially complementary parts of the same theological-political project. The *TTP*, in effect, draws out in a more explicit manner the theological, religious, and political implications of what the *Ethics* has established about God, nature, the human being, and society. What Spinoza wants to see is a politics of hope (for eternal reward) and fear (of eternal punishment) replaced by a politics of reason, virtue, freedom, and true moral behavior. The *TTP* and the *Ethics*, while written in very different styles and addressed to somewhat different audiences, each makes its own particular contribution to this goal. It is thus not so much a new project that Spinoza has taken on when he put aside the *Ethics* in the summer of 1665, but rather a continuation of the same overall mission albeit from a different direction and by different means.[14]

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body's demise and thus be immortal) is something that would "fright [men] from Obeying the Laws of their Countrey" and "lessen the dependence of Subjects on the Sovereign Power of their Countrey. For who will endeavor to obey the Laws ….Or who will not obey a Priest, that can make God, rather than his Soveraign, nay than God himselfe?" (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter 46, III.1082). My thanks to Dan Garber for reminding me of this, as well as for pointing out that this passage does not appear in the 1668 Latin translation of *Leviathan*, which Spinoza could have read. (Hobbes's Latin translation can be found in Noel Malcolm's 2012 edition of the *Leviathan*.) The passage is, however, in the 1667 Dutch translation (by Spinoza's friend Abraham van Berkel), which Spinoza also could have read.

[14] Studies of the *Ethics* cannot responsibly avoid references to Spinoza's political writings, although the intimate relationship between them is not always sufficiently emphasized. Still, there are some fine studies that integrate the works well into Spinoza's overall project. To take just a few recent examples, see Douglas, *Dutch Cartesianism*; Jacquet, *Sub specie aeternitatis* (esp. 191–206); Lagrée, *Le débat religieux*; and Nyden-Bullock, *Radical Cartesian Mind*.

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PART II
GOD AND ATHEISM

4

Prejudices, Common Notions, Intuitions

Knowledge of God between the *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

Mogens Lærke

1. Introduction

In E2p47, Spinoza states that "the human mind has adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence," a point he reiterates in the associated scholium in even stronger terms when claiming that "God's infinite essence and his eternity are known to all" (E2p47 and E2p47s).[1] These assertions are strikingly counter-intuitive. How can Spinoza seriously claim that God's essence is known to "all"? Both the Judaism he was raised in and the Calvinism he was surrounded by are, each in their fashion, deeply attached to the idea of an inscrutable divinity, the idea of a God unknown. Perhaps, then, he did not refer to what others call God, but only to his own conception? The claim appears only more extravagant for it. No one unfamiliar with Spinoza's *Ethics*—which after all is the vast majority of people—would spontaneously form the proposition that God is, as E1def6 defines God, a being absolutely infinite or a substance whose essence is expressed by infinite attributes. Indeed, one can reasonably assert that even a great many people who *are* familiar with Spinoza's *Ethics* still do not know (or accept) that this is what God is.

The demonstration of E2p47 does not bring any immediate relief to our puzzlement. Heavily predicated on specifically Spinozist premises, it is difficult to correlate with any straightforward intuition: "The human mind has ideas (by p22) from which it perceives (by p23) itself, (by p19) its own body, and (by p16C1 and p17) external bodies as actually existing. And so (by P45 and P46) it has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence, q.e.d." (E2p47d). I shall return to the demonstration below, but at first sight it is hard to see how this intricate piece of Spinozist reasoning, involving cross-references to no less than seven previous propositions, can amount to a demonstration of what *all men* know

[1] I am grateful to Julie Klein, Dan Garber, and Mélanie Zappulla for some very helpful comments and criticisms. I also thank the participants in the *Leer a Spinoza* workshop in Buenos Aires (August 2018) for a lively discussion.

about God. On the face of, it mostly says something about what Spinoza, after long and arduous deduction throughout the previous propositions of his treatise, thinks he has gotten to know about God, and little else.

The context, including the immediate context of the proposition in the *Ethics* and the broader context of Spinoza's other writings, exacerbates our troubles yet further. Hence, after demonstrating the proposition, and doubling down on the affirmation in even stronger terms in the scholium, Spinoza goes on, in that same scholium, to relativize his own bold proclamation to the limit of the paradoxical by now proclaiming "that men do not have so clear a knowledge of God as they do of the common notions." Moreover, the phrasing of E2p47s suggests that our knowledge of God is not a common notion. And yet, if we turn to *TTP* 6, we shall see that Spinoza here suggests that common notions *do* play some role in our conception of God. Indeed, he states that "knowledge of God must be drawn from common notions certain and known through themselves" [*TTP* 6 (G III 62/C II 129–30)]. So, do we know God by common notions or not? In fact, do we, after all, know God at all? And if we do, what is it, exactly, that we know, and how?

The following is an attempt to unpack and reconcile these various and seemingly contradictory assertions about knowledge of God in the *Ethics* by correlating them with Spinoza's parallel discussion of the same topic in *TTP* 6, including an associated annotation, the Annotation 6. I believe the key to understanding E2p47 and its scholium, along with the relevant passages in *TTP* 6, lies in understanding the nature and role of those "common notions" that Spinoza declares to be "clearer" than our knowledge of God in E2p47s, and in understanding how our common notions of things, our "reasoning" about things, relates to our knowledge of God. In §2 below, I shall explore two basic aspects of common notions, objective and subjective, which are both in play in E2p47, including the scholium. Next, I turn to showing how reasoning, or knowledge by common notions, relate, respectively, to imaginary and intuitive knowledge of God. I argue that our knowledge of the being we name "God" is never, in itself, a common notion, but always either imaginary or intuitive. And yet, the use of reason and the formation of common notions play a crucial role in attaining true knowledge of God, partly as an intellectual tool that allows us to liberate ourselves from the common prejudices that cause our imaginary, inadequate conceptions of God, and partly as an intellectual activity which, by means of a subtle shift in perspective that I shall describe in terms of a *Gestalt switch*, allows us to attain our intuitive knowledge of God or, rather, allows us to realize that we possessed that knowledge all along, as embedded in our simplest and most easily accessible conceptions.

2. Objectively and Subjectively Common Notions

When "we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things," we know things by "reason." Such knowledge is also called the second kind of

knowledge. It is superior to the first, inadequate kind of knowledge called imagination, but inferior to intuition, the third kind of knowledge which is knowledge of singular essences (E2p40s2; cf. E2p41–2). Common notions are "the foundations of our reasoning" (E2p40s1). Moreover, "the foundations of Philosophy are common notions" [*TTP* 14 (G III 179/C II 271)]. Clearly central to Spinoza's theory of knowledge, the details of his conception of common notions do however remain unexplored and largely implicit. For, as he explains in E2p40s1, even if he had many more things to say on the topic, he did "not wish to give rise to disgust by too long a discussion," "decided to pass over them here," and "set these aside for another Treatise" (G II 120/C I 476). Unfortunately, he never got around to writing that treatise intended to elucidate his full theory. This means that, in the rudimentary exposition we find in the *Ethics*, important ambiguities remain. Especially, from the long scholia that follow the deduction proper of the theory in E1p37–40,[2] it becomes clear that Spinoza understood common notions not only as general concepts of a certain kind, as opposed to what he calls universal and transcendental notions. He moreover understood them as general principles or axioms, as in the traditional Euclidean understanding of common notions, also found in Descartes.[3] Along similar lines, Spinoza suggests that some common notions are derived, abstract "second notions," here using a term originally coined by Jacobus Zabarella in his nominalist logic to describe mental concepts that are used as instruments of investigation [E2p40s1 (G II 120/C I 476)].[4] These are just some of the complications that a reader of Spinoza faces. A conjectural reconstruction of the full theory is, however, not something we can or need to undertake for the purposes of the present article. Here, I focus on the rudimentary development of the theory we find in the propositions E2p37–40.

Throughout those propositions, we learn that common notions are common in two distinct meanings. On the one hand, they are objectively common in the sense that they capture something which is *common to the objects that they are about*, common properties of things, while never being notions about singular essences: "the foundations of reason are notions (by p38) which explain those things that are common to all, and which (by p37) do not explain the essence of any singular thing" (E2p44c2d). They are not unlike what Hobbes calls "common

[2] Spinoza himself suggests in E2p40s2 (G II 122/C I 478) that the theory is covered by E2p38, E2p38c, E2p39, E2p39c, and E2p40. I would however argue that, in order to understand it, we will have to include at least also E2p37, E2p38, and E2p13L2, referenced in E2p37 and E2p38d.

[3] See E2p40s1. See also Ep 4, Spinoza to Oldenburg, October 1661 (G IV 13/C I 171), and Meijer's preface to the *DPP* (G I 27/C I 225). This aspect of Spinoza's theory of common notions has recently been explored in an excellent article by Mélanie Zappulla, "Les notions communes chez Euclide et Spinoza."

[4] See Zabarella, *Opera logica*, 1578, Lib. I, cap. 10, 14–16. There is no indication that Spinoza read Zabarella. But Zabarella's very commonly used distinction between first and second notions in logic can be found, for example, in Heereboord, *Meletemata philosophica*, 1665, vol. I, disp. L, art. iii–iv, 186, and in Keckermann, *Systema logicae*, 40 (1st edn 1600). Spinoza probably read Heereboord while at Leiden and clearly draws on him in the *Korte Verhandeling*. He owned a copy of Keckermann's work.

names" in his discussion of different kinds of universals in the *Leviathan*.[5] On the other hand, they are subjectively common in the sense that they capture notions *commonly shared by the subjects or minds entertaining them*. They are, or at least the most universal among them, "certain ideas, or notions, common to all men" (E2p38c). On this conception, Spinoza's common notions are closer to the classic conception of common notions of the Stoics, in the Latin tradition from Cicero and Seneca.[6] In the *Ethics*, Spinoza devotes most of his attention to developing the objective aspect of common notions which he prepares in E2p37, and addresses directly in E2p38, E2p39, and E2p40. He considers the subjective aspect in E2p38c.

In E2p37, Spinoza establishes that "what is common to all things…does not constitute the essence of any singular thing." Consequently, knowledge that expresses such commonality does not express the essence of any singular thing. Instead, "reason is necessarily related to the common properties of things" (E5p7).[7] Common notions express not what any singular thing is, but only what singular things have in common. More precisely, as Spinoza puts it in E2p29, in a passage that clearly announces the theory of common notions, we understand things adequately in this way when our mind "regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions." Not all kinds of properties are appropriate for forming such notions. However, to exemplify what he has in mind, Spinoza inserts a reference to E2p13L2, according to which "all bodies agree in that they involve the concept of one and the same attribute (by D1), and in that they can move now more slowly, now more quickly, and absolutely, that now they move, now they are at rest" (G II 98/C I 459). When it comes to extended modes, we are thus talking of basic mechanical properties. Correlatively, when it comes to ideas and minds, E3p56s suggests that we should "understand the common properties of the affects and of the Mind" (G II 186/C I 527). When it comes to modes of thought, the appropriate kind of properties are thus affective

[5] See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, vol. 2, ch. 4, 52.

[6] Common notions were at the core of a somewhat Platonized version of the Stoic theory of knowledge—most clearly but not only represented by Lipsius's neo-Stoicism—according to which common notions are innate dispositions or dictates of reason which, when prompted by experience, will become present to all human minds. Ancient scholars today debate the early Greek Stoics' level of commitment to innate ideas. For some, they were fully committed to the Aristotelian tenet of the mind as a *tabula rasa*. For others, they embraced a kind of dispositional nativism. Most early modern reception of Stoicism was, however, of the second variety because it relied less on the Greek Stoa and more on Latin writers, including Seneca, Cicero, Plutarch, and Sextus Empiricus. On this tradition, see e.g. Lagrée, *Le Néostoïcisme*, and Lagrée, "Justus Lipsius and Neostoicism."

[7] See also E5p11d: "Things we understand clearly and distinctly are either common properties of things or deduced from them." Both passages reference E2p40s2 as offering this "definition of reason," even though E2p40s2 does not exactly speak of "common properties" but defines reason as "the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things." The glosses in *Ethics* 5 suggest that we should read the "and" in E2p40s2 as establishing an equivalence rather than an alternative: to reason is not to form common notions *or* to form adequate ideas of properties, but to form common notions just *is* to form adequate ideas of (common) properties.

properties, the affections of the mind with their associated affects or emotions, as explored at length throughout Part 3 of the *Ethics*.

In E2p38, Spinoza establishes that "those things which are common to all, and which are equally in the part and in the whole, can only be conceived adequately." Common notions are based upon such properties as can be said to be equally everywhere in the things and parts of things to which they are attributed. For example, while bodies and parts of bodies have different extension, they cannot be said to have the property of being extended in any greater or lesser degree but it pertains to them all equally; similarly, bodies and their parts are individually defined by different proportions of motion and rest, but they must all be said to be equally endowed with motion and rest as such.[8]

E2p38 is concerned with those absolutely basic properties that are common to *all* things and which form the "foundations" of reason according to E2p44c2d. Less general common notions can however be formed by considering properties common only to *some* things. As Spinoza noted in E2p29, adequate understanding things through common notions only involves that the mind "regards *a number of* things at once," not necessarily that it regards *all* things at once. The point is confirmed when we move on to E2p39: "If something is common to, and peculiar to, the human body and certain external bodies by which the human body is usually affected, and is equally in the part and in the whole of each of them, its idea will also be adequate in the mind." The common notions in question here are evidently restricted in scope, pertaining only to what is common to the human body and certain external bodies. By providing just one example of a notion common only to some bodies, E2p39 points to a much broader field of common notions expressing all manner of commonalities between any given set of bodies. Most commentaries here follow Martial Gueroult in distinguishing between *universal* common notions common to all things, and *proper* common notions common only to some things.[9]

In E2p40, Spinoza ventures to demonstrate that "whatever ideas follow in the mind from ideas which are adequate in the mind are also adequate." The proposition ascertains that deductions based on certain notions are equally certain. This involves, importantly, that more abstract notions or relations between notions, notions of notions or what Spinoza also follows the tradition in calling "second notions," are equally adequate (see E2p40s1). There is considerably more to be said on that topic, but this will suffice for the present purposes.

In E2p38c, however, Spinoza briefly addresses another kind of commonality, subjective this time, concerning agreement not between the things that notions

[8] For a somewhat similar reading of common notions to be about qualitative properties, see Schliesser, "Angels and Philosophers," 512, and "Philosophy of Science," 183.

[9] See Gueroult, *Spinoza II*, 327–47; Sangiacomo, *Reason, Passions, and the Supreme Good*, 130–6; Lærke, *Freedom of Philosophizing*, 173–5; Hübner, "Epistemology"; Hübner, "Universals."

are about, but among the subjects who conceive them: "From this it follows that there are certain ideas, or notions, common to all men. For (by L2) all bodies agree in certain things, which (by p38) must be perceived adequately, or clearly and distinctly, by all." Since the most general properties of body such as extension and motion and rest can only be conceived adequately, he contends that all men must share those conceptions, presumably on the premise—stated in E2a4 but not referenced here—that men necessarily conceive of bodies in some way. The full justification of the inference is not quite evident, but Spinoza evidently sees a close connection between objectively and subjectively common notions.[10] All human beings are considered to be in possession of adequate knowledge of those properties which are common to all things, such as the ideas of extension and of motion and rest.[11]

As established in E2p38 and E2p38c, the connection between the objectively and the subjectively common does however remain restricted to such notions as are objectively common universally, i.e. notions of properties common to *all* things. Notions common only to *some* things are not necessarily known by all men. I believe this is the point behind the slightly uncomfortable distinction Spinoza makes in E2p40s1 between such common notions "which are [subjectively, ML] common" and those "which are clear and distinct only to those who have no prejudices." The large and complicated field of proper common notions, including the derived principles, axioms, and second notions associated with it, is not "known by all men" or subjectively common, but only rediscovered and laid open to the human mind as it sheds itself of prejudices.

The most apposite context for understanding Spinoza's proviso regarding absence of prejudice is here Descartes's discussion of common notions. For Descartes, common notions are universally true from the point of view of an intellect that is commonly shared by all men of sound mind. This intellect is however not equally realized in everybody. If common notions can be "denied by nobody," this only holds to the extent that people are not blinded by prejudice and actually pay attention to them, something they may very well never have an

[10] Some texts suggest that this connection is grounded metaphysically in the fact that the human intellect is part of the divine intellect: "our mind—simply from the fact that it contains God's Nature objectively in itself, and participates in it—has the power to form certain notions which explain the nature of things" [*TTP* 1 (G III 16/C II 78)]; cf. E2p34d; E2p11c; Ep 31, Spinoza to Oldenburg, November 1665 (G IV 173–4/C II 20). The cited passage, however, only speaks to our aptitude to form such notions, not to the fact that we actually have them. Moreover, it does not explain why human minds are particularly apt at forming such notions and why we should not attribute that same aptitude to the minds of, say, rocks, trees, or ants. Thanks to Mélanie Zappulla for pointing out these texts to me.

[11] Perhaps what he had in mind was something like this: (1) all human beings have perceptions of bodies; (2) no body can be perceived without perceiving what is most simple and common to them all, namely motion/rest and extension; (3) motion/rest and extension can only be perceived adequately; therefore (4) all human beings perceive motion/rest and extension adequately in whatever body they perceive.

"occasion" to do.[12] In Descartes, common notions are thus notions grounded in the intellect that are potentially but not actually common to all.[13] Spinoza is, I think, largely aligned with Descartes on this point, and this is reflected in the restriction imposed in E2p40s1: if we except the most common and simple common notions that are indeed known to all, all the objectively common notions are only *actually* common to men who pay attention and have no prejudices. This is also why, in E1app already, Spinoza stresses the paramount importance of "remov[ing] prejudices that could prevent my demonstrations from being perceived" given that "many prejudices […] could, and can, be a great obstacle to men's understanding the connection of things in the way I have explained it" [E1app (G II 77/C I 439)]. Indeed, prejudice drives a wedge between the two sides of an otherwise powerful alliance between adequate ideas, or objectively common notions, and subjectively common notions, between true knowledge and commonly shared knowledge, generating what Spinoza calls "common prejudices" [*TTP* 1 (G III 118/C II 192)].[14]

The *TTP* describes in considerable detail some of the basic mechanisms at work in the formation of such common prejudices. In particular, as we shall see in the following section, he shows how religious prejudice, by emphasizing the exceptional and supernatural, puts pressure on those most commonly shared notions that offer a reliable guide to adequate knowledge. Religious prejudice thus generates disdain for those truths that are most obvious to men, depriving them of a trove of adequate ideas that are otherwise easily within their grasp. And among those ideas, as we shall see, is the idea of God.

3. Prejudices of Ordinary Language and the Cure by Common Notions

We have already noted how Spinoza's formulations in E2p47s suggest that whatever notion of God we have, it cannot be a common notion or an idea of reason.

[12] See Descartes, *Principia*, I, §§49–50 (AT VIIIA 23–4/AT IXB 46/CSMK I 209). See also *Regulae* XII (AT X 419/CSMK I 44–5); *Notae in programma* (AT VIIIB 359–60/CSMK I 304–5); *Principia* I, §13 (AT VIIIA 9/AT IXB 30–1/CSMK I 197); *Principia* I, §49 (A VIIIA 22–3/AT IXB 46/CSMK I 209); *Secundae responsiones* (AT VII 162–3/AT IXA 126/CSMK II 114–15).

[13] See Letter 77, Descartes to Mersenne, October 16, 1639 (AT II 597–8/CSMK III 139). See also *Conversation with Burman*, April 16, 1648 (AT V 146/CSMK III 332–3), and *Epistola ad P. Dinet* (AT VII 580/CSMK II 391–2).

[14] As an interesting, anecdotal point, absence of such "common prejudices" was arguably one of the requirements for being admitted to the circle of "philosophical readers" for whom Spinoza intended the *TTP* and, I think, his work generally. See *TTP* Preface (G III 12/C II 75), and Ep 70, Schuller to Spinoza, November 14, 1675 (G IV 301–3/C II 461–4) where Leibniz is commended for being "free of the common prejudices of Theology," as a reason for allowing him to see a copy of the *Ethics* (G IV 302/C II 462). Spinoza, of course, declined, although he acknowledged that, from their previous exchange of letters, Leibniz had come through to him as a man of "liberal mentality" [Ep 72, Spinoza to Schuller, November 18, 1675 (G IV 305/C II 466)].

It can only be either an imaginary, inadequate idea or an intuitive, adequate idea. So when Spinoza, in E2p47, declares that we all have adequate knowledge of God, he has an intuitive idea of God in mind. I shall return in more detail to this question in the following section. And yet Spinoza also declares in E2p47s "that men do not have so clear a knowledge of God as they do of the common notions." This, on the contrary, suggests that some knowledge we have of God is not of the superior, intuitive kind, but, quite to the contrary, of the inferior, imaginary kind. How can Spinoza, at the same time, suggest that our knowledge of God is both intuitive and imaginary?

The reason why we entertain imaginary ideas about God, Spinoza writes in E2p47s, is that people "cannot imagine God, as they can bodies, and that they have joined the name God to the images of things which they are used to seeing." Indeed, Spinoza contends, "most errors consist in our not rightly applying names to things" (E2p47s), and the errors we make about the nature and existence of God are all of this kind. So the knowledge of "God" that Spinoza deems "less clear," appears to be not knowledge of God properly speaking but only knowledge of something that we *call* "God" but which is an imaginary idea. This allows us to do away with some of the apparent contradiction between E2p47 and E2p47s. Between the two, Spinoza does not claim about knowledge of the same being, God, that it is both adequate and less clear than common notions. In E2p47s, he establishes that we have less clear knowledge of *what we call God* than of common notions, thus recognizing that what many people refer to by the term "God" is indeed something inscrutable and ultimately unknowable. But this does not preclude what is demonstrated in E2p47, namely that we also have clear and adequate knowledge of *what God in fact is*, even when we do not realize that that is what that idea should be called. Hence, ignorance of God does not consist in not knowing what God is, but in the fact that we have been distracted from this knowledge by applying the term "God" to an inappropriate, imaginary idea. For example, we "wander from the true knowledge of God" when "feign[ing] a God, like man, consisting of a body and a mind, and subject to passions" [E1p15 (G II 57/C I 471)].

Such misnomers find their way into language because of prejudice. For example, when some philosophers define God as an all-perfect being and consider perfection a divine attribute, they do this "more from prejudice than from true knowledge."[15] And when prejudice becomes entrenched and embedded in common language, it turns into "superstition," i.e. "deeply rooted" and

[15] "[A]fter men began to from universal ideas, and devise models, […] and prefer some models of things to others, it came about that each one called perfect what he saw agreed with the universal idea he had formed of this kind of thing […]. We see, therefore, that men are accustomed to call natural things perfect or imperfect more from prejudice than from true knowledge" [E4pref (G II 206/C II 544)]. The argument only works if we adopt a common understanding of perfection and put to one side Spinoza's own understanding of "perfection" as identical to "reality" (E1p9).

"longstanding" prejudice.[16] Superstition thus marks the point where prejudice gains foothold in the ordinary use of words and takes residence in the structures of language, giving rise to a kind of parallel reality observed through the lens of the imagination where things are turned "completely upside down" [E1app (G II 80/C I 442)] and people "interpret nature in amazing ways, as if the whole of nature were as crazy as they are" [*TTP* Preface (G III 5/C II 66)].[17] The *TTP* explains in considerable detail how such associations of prejudice and ordinary language come about. In *TTP* 6, in particular, Spinoza stresses how prejudice, or preconceived opinion, must generally be construed as cases of mistaken identity rather than false conception: "Indeed, when [men] see or hear something new, unless they take great precautions against their preconceived opinions, they will, for the most part, be so prejudiced by them that they will perceive something completely different from what they see or hear has happened" [*TTP* 6 (G III 91–2/C II 164)]. In the case of *theological* prejudice, this involves considering as divine perceptions what is in fact only effects of human nature, grounded in our imagination and not in the nature of things, as Spinoza explains at length in E1app.[18]

An important further aspect of this argument has to do with the construction of belief in the supernatural and the exceptionality of prophetic knowledge. Spinoza explains throughout the first chapters of the *TTP* that the imagination, contrary to reason, tends to be more impressed by what is *vivid* than by what is *true*. Indeed, vivacity of imagination is at the heart of prophetic knowledge as such, as opposed to natural knowledge which is grounded in reason. In *TTP* 1, while explaining the nature and power of prophecy, Spinoza thus shows how otherwise simple and straightforward rational notions are ignored and disdained by the common man who tends to valorize only what he finds exceptional because its vivacious appeal to the imagination trumps the conceptual clarity of common rationality:

> Because this natural knowledge is common to all men (depending, as it does, on foundations common to all), the common people, who always thirst for things rare and foreign to their nature, who spurn their natural gifts, do not value it highly. When they speak of prophetic knowledge, they mean to exclude natural knowledge. [*TTP* 1 (G III 15/C II 77)][19]

[16] "Thus this prejudice was changed into superstition, and struck deep roots in their minds [*in mentibus egit radices*]"; "[…] they did not on that account give up their longstanding prejudice [*inveterata praejudicia*]" [E1app (G II 79/C I 441)].

[17] See also E1app, where Spinoza describes finalist conceptions of nature to have "shown only that nature and the Gods are as mad as men" (G II 79/C I 441).

[18] See the conclusion to E1app, summing up the aim of the appendix: "These are the prejudices I undertook to note here" [E1app (G II 83/C I 446)].

[19] See also *TTP* 1: "because natural knowledge is common to all, men do not value it so highly" (G III 27/C II 91).

Spinoza's main complaint about the valorization of the exceptional and supernatural is that the corresponding dismissal and de-valorization of the common and natural eventually leads to atheism.[20] Moreover, and conversely, it causes those whose knowledge of God has been perverted by prejudice to accuse of atheism those who in fact entertain an adequate notion of God:

> So those who eagerly search the Prophetic books for wisdom, and knowledge of both natural and spiritual matters, go completely astray […]. Sadly, things have come to this: people who openly confess that they have no idea of God, and that they know God only through created things (whose causes they are ignorant of), do not blush to accuse Philosophers of Atheism. [*TTP* 2 (G III 29–30/C II 94)]

In the *TTP*, Spinoza's argument regarding subjectively common notions—i.e. about the constitution and perversion of commonly shared knowledge—mostly moves within this closed circuit of theological reasoning. It does however also point to an important epistemological lesson, by explaining why and how prejudice and superstition can become so powerful that they can cloud and distract us even from those adequate ideas that come most easily to us, including the idea of God. The valorization of the exceptional prompts us to mistakenly associate God with something inscrutable and beyond ordinary understanding, accessible only to prophets with supernatural cognitive powers. And these common prejudices become so deeply embedded in our language that we spontaneously take the term "God" to signify something whose nature is supremely difficult to grasp, rather than something simple and easily accessible to all.

The use of reason and conception of true common notions, including doing natural philosophy, play an essential role in overcoming these prejudices about the nature of God. What allows them to play that role is the method or order of investigation their usage prescribes:

> In examining natural things we strive to investigate first the things most universal and common to the whole of nature: motion and rest, and their laws and rules, which nature always observes and through which it continuously acts. From these we proceed gradually to other, less universal things. [*TTP* 7 (G III 102/C II 176)][21]

[20] See *TTP* 6 (G III 86–7/C II 158–9).

[21] Spinoza goes on to establish the analogy to the reading of Scripture: "In the same way, the first thing we must seek from the history of Scripture is what is most universal, what is the basis and foundation of the whole of Scripture, and finally, what all the Prophets commend in it as an eternal teaching, most useful for all mortals" [*TTP* 7 (G III 102/C II 176)]; see also *TTP* 7 (G III 104/C II 178). Eventually, the aim of the exercise is to establish that "the moral teachings […] contained in the Bible […] can be demonstrated from common notions" [*TTP* 7 (G III 99/C II 171)]. On the passage, see also Schliesser, "Angels and Philosophers," 511.

Thus proceeding from the most general common notions toward more specific ones is also the method of examination Spinoza himself adopts in the *Ethics*. Here, the method coincides with the geometrical order of demonstration which begins with definitions and general principles of reasoning, i.e. axioms, from which more specific propositions are then deduced. Adopting this method, however, produces not only adequate knowledge about things. By offering novel definitions or by assigning new meanings to terms by using them in unusual ways in demonstrations for example, it also serves to reconfigure the language employed to express it. It is this linguistic aspect of our progressive geometrical reconstruction of knowledge that helps us overcome the prejudices embedded in our misuse of words. This is why, as Spinoza stresses in E1app, mathematics not only provides "another standard of truth," but also helps us root out "common prejudices" in order to attain "the true knowledge of things" [E1app (G II 79–80/C I 441–2)]. Using the geometrical order offers not only a path to acquire adequate ideas but also the means to build and acquire a restructured language capable of expressing those ideas without prejudice.

We now have the interpretive resources necessary to reconcile the two assertions that "the human mind has adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence" (E2p47) while at the same time human beings do "not have so clear a knowledge of God as they do of the common notions" (E2p47s). The latter is true exactly because people have "joined the name God to the images of things which they are used to seeing" (E2p47). Consequently, the term "God" has different references in the two assertions. In the first, it refers to an adequate conception of God grounded in reason and common notions; in the second, it refers to an imaginary conception of God grounded in superstition and common prejudice.

Such equivocations in Spinoza's use of terms are far from unusual. Indeed, they are the effects of a fairly consistent strategy for language use deployed throughout the *Ethics*, using the geometrical method to dislodge language from the imaginary structures in which it is naturally steeped, twisting terms away from their ordinary meanings and redeploying them within a revised philosophical framework wherein they acquire new, adequate meaning.[22] Throughout the *Ethics*, Spinoza thus deploys his own terminological framework within the structures of the basic geometrical demonstration formed by the definitions, axioms, propositions, and demonstrations. The scholia, by contrast, are frequently polemical, and engage with other philosophical and theological positions, often adopting their language. And this same argumentative strategy explains the difficulties most unsuspecting readers will experience in reconciling E2p47 with E2p47s. In the proposition and its demonstration, Spinoza puts the geometrical method to the task of dislodging the term "God" from its habitual, imaginary semantic framework, forcing us to

[22] For a full analysis, see Lærke, "Spinoza's Language."

pay attention to the adequate idea we do in fact possess. In the scholium, by contrast, he offers a critical examination of what the term "God" is commonly understood to signify, showing how it is a misnomer embedded in common prejudice.

4. The *Gestalt Switch*: Most Simple Notions and the Intuition of God

The consideration of Spinoza's linguistic strategies does not, however, suffice to solve all difficulties in E2p47 and its scholium. As already noted, Spinoza's contention that human beings do "not have so clear a knowledge of God as they do of the common notions" (E2p47s) suggests not only, as shown in the previous section, that much of our discourse about "God" refers to an imaginary, inadequate idea. It also suggests that whatever true, adequate idea about God we can acquire will not be a common notion, but an intuition. This is hardly surprising, for it is difficult to see what God could really have something in common *with* given that God is unique (E1p14). Moreover, it is not clear how there could be any common notion of God's constituents, the attributes, since Spinoza establishes from very early on that those attributes "have nothing in common" (E1p2). But if God is not known adequately by a common notion, this only leaves one option, namely, that God is known adequately by intuition. The point finds some further confirmation in E2p47s, when Spinoza declares that, from the fact that we possess an adequate idea of God, it follows that we can deduce "a great many things which we know adequately, and so can form that third kind of knowledge of which we spoke in P40S2 and of whose excellence and utility we shall speak in Part V." According to E2p40s2, this third kind of knowledge—i.e. intuitive knowledge—"proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things" (E2p40s2). Spinoza, of course, does not explicitly say that the knowledge of the essence of God's attributes from which the third kind of knowledge proceeds is itself of the third and not the second kind. But given that knowledge by reason and common notions is never knowledge of singular essences (E2p37), and that Spinoza here speaks of knowledge that proceeds from the essence of God to the essence of things, the knowledge of God in question here *must* be intuitive. Similarly, the "adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence" that Spinoza has in mind in E2p47 and E2p47s must therefore be intuitive.[23] God simply cannot be known by reason and common notions.

[23] *TTP* 1 offers additional evidence in the context of a discussion of how revelation differs from natural knowledge. Here, Spinoza explains that revelation is communicated through the imagination while natural knowledge is dictated by God to the intellect. And in order to clarify that difference, he briefly explains how the mind forms natural knowledge: "our mind—simply from the fact that it contains God's Nature objectively in itself, and participates in it—has the power to form certain notions

And yet, if we turn to the *TTP*, we learn that common notions *do* in fact play a role in our obtaining adequate knowledge of God. Indeed, in *TTP* 4, Spinoza explicitly states that "knowledge of God must be drawn from common notions certain and known through themselves" (G III 61/C II 129–30). The *Ethics* provides little by way of solving this conundrum. *TTP* 6, however, along with an associated annotation, offers a kind of explanation. There, Spinoza aims at establishing that nothing occurs outside "the fixed and immutable order of nature." And in the process of doing that, he establishes that we know this order through certain "principles" and "notions" [*TTP* 6 (G III 84/C II 156)]. And those principles, he pursues, are also important for knowing the existence of God:

> When [*Cum*][24] God's existence is not known through itself [reference to ADN VI], it must necessarily be inferred from notions whose truth is so firm and steady that no power can be or be conceived by which they could be changed. At least, so they must appear to us when we infer God's existence from them, if we want to infer it beyond any chance of doubt. For if we could conceive that the notions themselves could be changed by some power, whatever in the end it was, we would doubt their truth, and consequently also doubt our conclusion, viz. God's existence, so that we could never be certain of anything. [*TTP* 6 (G III 84/C II 156; trans. modified)]

Which are these "firm and steady" notions that Spinoza here affirms will allow us to infer the existence of God? From the immediate context of the *TTP*, they appear very closely related to the immutable natural order of things, i.e. to the laws of nature. Hence, as Spinoza notes in *TTP* 3, in order to attain knowledge of God and divine necessity, we must recognize that the "universal laws of nature, according to which all things happen and are determined, are nothing but the eternal decrees of God, which always involve eternal truth and necessity," and that when "we say that all things happen according to the laws of nature, or that they are ordered according to the decree and guidance of God, we say the same thing" (G III 46/C II 112). It thus seems as if, in *TTP* 6, Spinoza infers the existence of God from the fundamental laws and order of nature,

which explain the nature of things and teach us how to conduct our lives" [*TTP* 1 (G III 16/C II 77–8)]. In Cartesian terminology, for a mind to contain something objectively means having an idea of it, i.e. having some knowledge of it. What Spinoza states here is therefore similar to what he also establishes in E2p47 and E2p40s2, namely that the human mind has adequate knowledge of the essence of God and that it can proceed from that knowledge to the knowledge of the essence or nature of singular things.

[24] Curley here translates the conjunction *cum* by "since." It suggests that Spinoza had a permanent state of knowledge in mind. But, as I will show, the annotation attempts to explain how to overcome it and grasp how God's existence is indeed "known through itself." In the accompanying ADN 6, Spinoza formulates the same state of knowledge by means of the adverb *quamdiu*, or "so long as": "So long as [*quamdiu*] the idea we have of God himself is not clear and distinct, but confused, we doubt God's existence" [*TTP* ADN 6 (G III 252/C II 156)].

arguing that these laws and this order prove the existence of God. The argument at first appears as a fairly straightforward argument from design: the existence of an immutable order of nature indicates the existence of an immutable God ordering nature.

Reading the passage in that fashion does however leave us in a difficult position when comparing with the *Ethics*. For is this not exactly the kind of argument Spinoza rejects in E1app when arguing that "order" is a merely relative concept that teaches us nothing about the nature of things but only about how they affect us and our imagination (G II 78/C I 440)? Moreover, when seen in light of E2p47, stating that we all have adequate knowledge of God, a substance whose essence it is to be in itself and conceived through itself (E1d3 and E1p11), how can Spinoza then go on to base an entire argument in the *TPP* on the premise that "God's existence is not known through itself"?

Spinoza himself realized the need for clarification. While composing some additional notes for a projected but never published second edition of the *TTP*, he thus added an explanatory note, today known as the Annotation 6 (ADN 6). To the extent that the annotation was designed to iron out philosophical ambiguities in the original text, Spinoza presumably attempted to be as precise and succinct as possible. It therefore warrants close scrutiny. I have divided the annotation into two parts for analytic purposes, and shall comment on them in turn. Here is the first part:

> So long as the idea we have of God himself is not clear and distinct, but confused, we doubt God's existence, and consequently we doubt everything. For just as someone who does not properly know the nature of a triangle does not know that its three angles are equal to two right angles, so one who conceives the divine nature confusedly does not see that it pertains to the nature of God to exist. [*TTP* ADN 6 (G III 252/C II 156)]

As it turns out, Spinoza's ultimate concern was not to establish the relation that the firm and steady notions of things, whatever they are, entertain with the existence of God. It was to establish the relation that the notion of God entertains with the existence of God. And what the original passage suggests is that as long as our understanding of the former relation is confused, the necessity of the latter relation is not properly grasped. This part of the annotation thus brings us back to the discussion about subjectively common notions and common prejudices. In order to attain the idea of God, we first need to work our way through confused ideas—prejudices and distractions—making us apply the name of "God" to the wrong ideas, preventing us from attending to the true idea of God we in fact possess. If, however, we manage to make our way through the thicket of misnomers and identify the reference of the name "God" correctly, we will realize that this name pertains to a being whose existence we cannot doubt.

When seen in the light of the annotation, Spinoza did not have an argument from design in mind in the original passage in *TTP* 6. Rather, he wanted to argue that contemplating firm and steady notions such as the laws of nature can help us overcome prejudices that prevent us from recognizing that the term "God" refers to a being whose existence follows from its very nature. And to that effect, he offers a geometrical analogy between the adequate conception of a triangle and the conception of a being—an analogy that emphasizes Spinoza's confidence in the necessary and self-evident qualities of mathematical knowledge,[25] but also hints at the role that geometrical exposition can play in restructuring the ways we speak about God.

The first part of ADN 6 thus specifies where we begin (in confused misnomers) and where we are supposed to end (with a self-evident understanding of God's necessity). It does, however, not explain how it is, exactly, we are supposed to get from one to the other. This is the question that Spinoza attempts to tackle in Part 2 of the annotation:

> For us to be able to conceive God's nature clearly and distinctly, we must attend to certain very simple notions, called common notions, and connect with them those pertaining to the divine nature. If we do that, it becomes evident to us: first, that God exists necessarily and is everywhere; next, that whatever we conceive involves in itself the nature of God and is conceived through it; and finally, that everything we conceive adequately is true. But on these matters see the preface of the book entitled *The Principles of Philosophy Demonstrated in a Geometric Manner* [i.e. *DPP*]. [*TTP* ADN 6 (G III 252–3/C II 156)]

The very simple notions Spinoza refers to here are, we can assume, none other than the firm and steady notions of the original passage in *TTP* 6 he is in the process of elucidating. But what are those notions, exactly? As we have already seen, they are intimately related to the laws of nature. Moreover, they refer to what is most simple and basic about them. More precisely, I think Spinoza has in mind those most fundamental mechanical properties of bodies on the basis of which the laws of nature are articulated. In other words, the "very simple notions" of ADN 6 are best understood in terms of those most universal common notions that Spinoza discusses in E2p38 and of which he offers two examples in E2p13L2, namely extension and motion and rest. These are the simplest properties common to all bodies, the fundamental defining features of the physical world. This said, the notions in question need not all pertain to the physical world. The

[25] Cf. the response to Albert Burgh where Spinoza affirms knowing the true philosophy "in the same way you know that the three Angles of a Triangle are equal to two right angles. No one will deny that this is enough, not if his brain is healthy […]. For the true is the indicator both of itself and of the false" [Ep. 76, Spinoza to Burgh, late 1675 or early 1676 (G I 320/C II 475)].

symmetry of Spinoza's system requires that corresponding universal properties common to all minds also exist.[26] And those universal properties of the mind are not necessarily hard to identify. For as all bodies are defined by the fact that they are extended and move around, minds are defined by the fact that they think and understand, i.e. that they produce ideas which are ideas of something.

All these most universal common notions serve to "explain the nature of things" as Spinoza puts it in *TTP* 1 because all things are conceived through those notions:[27] there can be no adequate knowledge of any body which does not include knowledge of the universal properties of being extended and moving/resting; and there can be no adequate knowledge of any mind which does not include knowledge of the universal properties of thinking and intellection or understanding. So these general common notions—extension, motion and rest, thought, intellect—are all *universal*.

They are however not all *simple*. According to *TIE*, §§63–4, the "idea of a most simple thing" can only be "known […] as a whole or not at all" and is not "made from the composition of distinct ideas" (G II 25 C I 29).[28] In other words, a most simple notion cannot be analysed into more primitive constituent elements and must therefore, if known, be known through itself.[29] This, however, is the case neither with motion/rest nor with intellection or understanding, for none of those universal properties can be conceived without conceiving something else: motion cannot be conceived without a moving body;[30] understanding cannot be conceived without an idea by means of which one understands. They are not entirely simple properties. This is also why, in Spinoza's metaphysics, both motion/rest and infinite intellect figure as infinite modes which, as is the case for all modes, are conceived through something else.[31]

The general common notions of extension and thought, however, *are* simple in the required sense. All things are conceived through them, but they are not themselves conceived through anything else. Hence, when Spinoza speaks of "very simply notions" in Annotation 6, he first of all has extension and thought in mind, understood as those common properties of things which are not just *universal*, i.e. properties that pertain to all things, but also *simple*, or properties of things that are not conceived through any other property.

[26] For a similar point, see Schliesser, "Angels and Philosophers," 512.
[27] See *TTP* 1 (G III 16/C II 77–8).
[28] See also *TIE* §§68 and 85 (C II 26/C I 31 and C II 22/C I 37).
[29] Spinoza does not define simplicity in the *Ethics*, but a conception of it similar to the one used in the *TIE* can be intimated from *CM* II, v (G I 258/C I 324) and E2p15.
[30] The point is most clearly stated in *DPP* 2a6 (G I 184/C I 265): "Motion, rest, figure and the like cannot be conceived without extension" and in *CM* I, 1 (G I 237/C I 303): "motion cannot be conceived without the body." Compare with Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* I, 53 (AT VIII 30–1/CSMK I 210–11).
[31] See E1p21; E1p31; Ep 64, Spinoza to Schuller, July 29, 1675 (G IV 278/C II 439).

Now, the common notions we have of extension or thought as universal, simple properties do not constitute knowledge of *God*. Spinoza does, of course, believe that knowledge of extension and thought *is* knowledge of God in some sense, because both extension and thought express God's essence as attributes of the unique substance.[32] However, when considered *as common notions*, the notions of extension and thought procure us knowledge of the properties of *things*, namely knowledge of simple properties that all things have in common. And yet, as Spinoza puts it in ADN 6, we can somehow "connect" these simple notions to "those pertaining to the divine nature" (G III 252–3/C II 156). The challenge is to understand exactly what that "connection" consists in, and how we get from knowledge of things to knowledge of God.

My suggestion is that the "connection" in question is established by the shortest inferential path possible because the difference between the two kinds of notions is merely an *aspectual* one. The notions of extension and thought qua simple properties of things, on the one hand, and the notions of extension and thought qua expressions of the essence of God, on the other, are exactly the same only perceived under two distinct aspects, namely, under the aspect of reason and common notions, and under the aspect of intuition and singular essences. Under one aspect, extension and thought are simple common notions in the sense of simple, universal properties through which all things are conceived. This is how extension and thought are grasped under the aspect of reason, as knowledge of the second kind pertaining to what is common to all things. Under another aspect, however, thought and extension are attributes conceived through themselves that express the essence of God. On this understanding, all things are conceived as infinitely many modes that follow from this unique essence. This is how extension and thought are grasped under the aspect of intuition, as knowledge of the third kind pertaining to what is of the essence of God. And in order to establish the connection between them, all we need to do is to switch from one aspect to the other in a way similar to the way in which our mind moves from the Duck to the Rabbit and vice versa when contemplating the famous image. In other words, our mind must perform a *Gestalt switch* that allows us to move from considering extension and thought under the aspect of reason, as common properties of all things, to considering them under the aspect of intuition, as essential attributes of God.[33] And by operating that switch, knowledge about the simplest

[32] See E2p1–E2p2.

[33] I would also suggest reading along these lines Spinoza's difficult reasoning in *TIE*, §101, regarding those "fixed and eternal things" through which the essence of singular things is conceived. He writes: "although these fixed and eternal things are singular, nevertheless, because of their presence everywhere, and most extensive power, *they will be to us like universals*, or genera of the definitions of singular, changeable things, and the proximate causes of all things" (G II 37/C 41; my italics). Spinoza, I have argued elsewhere, is not quite confident in his reasoning throughout the last paragraphs of the *TIE* or about how to identify the fixed natures in question, which is perhaps why the text ends abruptly shortly after and remained unfinished (see Lærke, "Leibniz," 106–20). Moreover, at this stage, Spinoza

notions pertaining to all things also affords us knowledge about the essence of God, exactly as Spinoza claims in *TTP* 6 and ADN 6.

So how does the switch operate? Spinoza's reasoning, I suggest, relies on two premises, one a posteriori, the other a priori. The first premise is that singular thoughts and singular bodies exist. In the *Ethics*, those premises are made explicit in E2p1 and E2p2. The second premise is that, if conceived, something that cannot be conceived through something else, must be conceived through itself. In the *Ethics*, this is axiomatically stated in E1a2. His reasoning is then the following: singular things exist in the form of singular thoughts and singular bodies. This is the natural world we encounter. By using our reason, we can acquire adequate knowledge of how these things relate to other things, that is to say, conceive of objectively common notions which express their "agreements, differences, and oppositions" (E2p29). Some of these common notions take the form of general concepts; others take the form of general principles, axioms or laws. Moreover, some of these notions are universal and apply to all things; others are proper and apply only to some things. And finally, some of these notions are composite and require other, simpler notions to be conceived; others are simple and cannot be conceived through any other notions. The adequate conception of all common notions, however, ultimately relies on the adequate conception of this last kind, the common notions both universal and simple. Spinoza identifies only two such simple and universal common properties: extension is a simple property common to all bodies; thought is a simple property common to all minds or ideas. Nothing is or can be adequately conceived if those two are not adequately conceived. And since by definition they cannot be conceived through anything else, if they are conceived, it can only be in one way, namely *through themselves*. So whenever we conceive something adequately through common notions, it involves conceiving adequately something through which all things are conceived but which is itself conceived through itself. And it is in this last characteristic that we find the operator of the switch that allows moving from rational knowledge of the common properties of things to intuitive knowledge of the essence of God. For to be "conceived though itself" is also how Spinoza characterizes the conception of God's essential attributes: "Each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself" (E1p10). In conceiving of extension and thought as simple

had not yet conceived of his theory of common notions. Nonetheless, when read in a prospective mode, I think the reasoning he offers here points toward the mature conception of divine attributes which, in the *Ethics*, will be the fixed and eternal things through which all things are conceived. Moreover, and more importantly for our purposes, the notion that, even though they are "singular," they "will be to us like universals" points to the double status of thought and extension in the *Ethics* that the *Gestalt switch* turns on: essentially, the attributes are unique and indivisible aspects of substance; however, we grasp them first as common notions, i.e. as universal and simple properties common to all things. For a different, but insightful reading of this passage on universals in the *TIE* in terms of *ersatz abstracta*, see also Newlands, "Early Anti-Abstractionism," 266–7; and Newlands, "Universals," 77.

properties common to all things we thus also gain immediate and intuitive access to what expresses the essence of God, namely the attributes. We only have to shift our focus from one aspect of them to the other, from what they are with respect to things to what they then must be with respect to God.

Let us recapitulate. Whatever adequate notions we rationally conceive regarding the common properties of things, be they universal or proper, general concepts or principles, they will ultimately rely on simple, universal notions that we intuitively grasp to pertain also to the nature of God as attributes conceived through themselves, namely the notions of thought and extension.[34] These adequate notions offer us an opportunity to know God. Certainly, rational conception of *things* by common notions is not in itself knowledge of *God*. Still, such rational conception necessarily *involves* intuitive knowledge of God whose essence is implied or involved in those simple common notions which are necessarily known by all (E2p38c). This is what Spinoza stresses in E2p46d when writing that "whether the thing is considered as a part or as a whole, its idea, whether of the whole or a part (by p45), will involve God's eternal and infinite essence. So what gives knowledge of an eternal and infinite essence of God is common to all, and is equally in the part and in the whole."

Hence, when Spinoza in *TTP* 6 and ADN 6 argues that knowledge of God can be "inferred" from the simplest common notions, he does not suggest that we can form a common notion of God. He suggests that from the simplest common notions we have about *things*, namely that they all have the *properties* of extension and thought, we can infer that those same simplest properties of things also pertain to the *essence* of God as *attributes*. The "inference" in question consists in a *Gestalt switch* where we move—or "infer"—from the knowledge that a thing *A* has a universal and simple property *q* to the knowledge that *q* must then be a divine attribute of which a thing *A* is a mode, because this is just two ways of contemplating the same relation, or two aspects of the same relation. And since knowing the attributes under the latter aspect is not knowledge of a common notion but of the singular essence of God, operating the switch makes the intellect move from reason to intuition, from knowledge of the second kind about what is common to all things to knowledge of the third kind about the essence of God. So when Spinoza explains in E2p47 that "men do not have so clear a knowledge of God as they do of the common notions," the underlying suggestion is that we should employ our simplest and most widely shared common notions as an intellectual springboard to reach the intuition about God's essence which is involved in each

[34] The interpretation is corroborated by the deductive strategy that Spinoza adopts in E2p1 and E2p2 in order to demonstrate that thought and extension are attributes of God. Hence, in E2p1d, he infers from the existence of singular thoughts that "there belongs to God an attribute whose concept all singular thoughts involve" (E2p1d). And in E2p2d, he simply indicates that "the demonstration of this proceeds in the same way," and thus infers from the existence of singular bodies that there belongs to God an attribute whose concept all singular bodies involve.

and every of our adequate conceptions.[35] This, I contend, is what Spinoza means when, in the *TTP*, he writes that, in order to know God's existence adequately, "we must attend to certain very simple notions, called common notions, and connect with them those pertaining to the divine nature" [*TTP* ADN 6 (G III 253/C II 156)].

5. Conclusion

Knowledge of God can be inadequate but is in that case imaginary knowledge, and knowledge of God only in name. Or knowledge of God can be adequate and, in that case, it is intuitive knowledge of the divine essence. In E2p47, Spinoza claims that all human beings possess such intuitive knowledge of God, although, in the accompanying scholium, he does allow that we do not always correctly identify it, distracted as we are by prejudices about the divine nature. God, however, is never known by reason. This is because reason is knowledge of common notions and since God is unique, there cannot be a common notion of God.[36] And yet, in order to overcome our prejudices about the reference of the name "God," and eventually "connect" with our intuitive knowledge of what God really is, we must go via reason. For it is by means of reason and common notions that we obtain the kind of knowledge about natural things that will ultimately allow us to grasp the nature of the being that produced them all. E2p47, in its seemingly extraordinary epistemological optimism, thus points to a path for the intellect seeking to reconnect with the true knowledge of God it in fact already possesses, but does not yet know how to recognize. In order to achieve that, the use of language must first be purged of the common prejudices lingering in its very structure, in the imaginary ways in which we assign meaning to words. Only in this way will we come to realize that what we usually call God and that we cannot really know, is in fact not God. Instead, something that we all know but usually do not call God, is in fact God. Second, we must pay attention to the simplest and most common notions we have about things because it is them, and not notions about the extraordinary and the supernatural that we tend to emphasize when speaking of God, which will bring us closer to God. These most simple

[35] Incidentally, the interpretation squares nicely with Spinoza's own illustration in E2p40s2 of the difference between the three kinds of knowledge, i.e. the calculation of the fourth proportional. Hence, he explains, in more complex scenarios, we calculate this correctly by using reason, i.e. by inferring the fourth proportional from the common property of proportionals as deduced by Euclid. However, "in the simplest numbers none of this is necessary," because "we infer the fourth number from the ratio which, in one glance, we see the first number to have to the second" (G II 122/C 478). This is how Spinoza illustrates intuitive knowledge. The analogy between "the simplest numbers" and the "very simple notions" of ADN 6 should be clear enough.

[36] For a similar conclusion, see Gueroult, *Spinoza II*, 415–16 (I translate): "Hence, if Reason, in itself, leads [the wise] to the threshold of intuitive knowledge, it does not lead beyond it, for the sphere of *Reason* is not that of the knowledge of God."

notions—the notions of extension and thought—express, at the same time, the common properties of all things and the essence of God. In each case, however, they are not considered under the same aspect, or *Gestalt*. Under one aspect, they are considered to express common properties of things and are thus known by *reason*; under the other aspect, they are considered to express a singular essence of God, and are thus known by *intuition*. Switching from one aspect to the other requires only that we understand that extension and thought cannot be conceived through anything else and that, given that we do in fact conceive them everywhere and in everything, there is only one way in which that is possible, namely, because we conceive them in themselves, and that they therefore count as divine attributes. It is thus by contemplating the simplest common properties of things that we also "infer" or "connect to" our intuitions about the essence of the unique being within which all those things exist. When we attend to the simple fact concerning a body that it is extended, we intuit that extension is of the essence of God; and when we attend to the simple fact concerning a mind that it thinks, we intuit that thought is of the essence of God. And it is in this sense that the otherwise somewhat elliptical demonstration of E2p47 testifies to the fact that we get to intuit the divine in our most simplest notions about things: "The human mind has ideas from which it perceives itself, its own body, and external bodies as actually existing. And so it has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence, q.e.d." (E2p47d).

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5

Spinoza's 'Atheism', the *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

Yitzhak Y. Melamed

> "Nur Unverstand und Böswilligkeit konnten dieser Lehre das Beiwort "atheistisch" beilegen. Keiner hat sich jemals erhabener über die Gottheit ausgesprochen wie Spinoza."[1]

> "רבותינו ז"ל אמרו מה הקב"ה ממלא את כל העולם, כך הנשמה ממלאה את כל הגוף. ורצונם שכמו שהקב"ה הוא *כולו בכל העולם* וכלו בכל חלק ממנו, כך הנשמה הטהורה היא כלה בכל הגוף וכלה בכל חלק ממנו"[2]

1. Introduction

The impermanence of human affairs is a major theme in Spinoza's discussions of political histories,[3] and from our present-day perspective it is both intriguing and ironic to see how this very theme has played out in the evolving fate of Spinoza's association with atheism. While Spinoza's contemporaries charged him with atheism in order to impugn his philosophy (and sometimes his character), in our times many lay readers and some scholars portray Spinoza as an atheist in order to commemorate his role as a founder of modern secularism. In this chapter, I will argue that Spinoza deserves neither vilification nor praise for being an atheist, for the simple reason that he was not one (unless one employs the term 'atheism' in a very peculiar sense).

[1] "Only malice or lack of judgement could describe Spinoza's teaching as 'atheistic.' No one has ever expressed himself more sublimely about the divinity than Spinoza" (Heine, *Zur Geschichte der Religion*, 105 / *Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, 52).

[2] "Our Rabbis of blessed memory said: just as God fills the entire world, so does the soul fill the entire body. What they meant by this saying is that just as God is *wholly in the entire world*, and *wholly* in every part of the world, so too the pure soul is wholly in the entire body, and wholly in every part of it." Menashe Ben Israel, *Nishmat Hayim*, 125. Italics added.

[3] See, for example, *TTP* 4 (G III 57/C II 124). Unless otherwise marked, all quotes from Spinoza's works and letters are from Curley's translation. I have relied on Gebhardt's critical edition for the Latin and Dutch text of Spinoza. I would like to thank Warren Zev Harvey, Justin Bledin, Clare Carlisle, Zach Gartenberg, Shai Grabie, Jonathan Garb, and the late Ada Rapoport-Albert, for their helpful comments and criticisms on earlier versions of this chapter. I am particularly grateful to Steven Nadler for clarifying some important issues in his writing, and to Dan Garber and Mogens Lærke for their detailed comments which greatly improved the chapter.

I have chosen the current topic as my contribution to a volume focused on the *TTP*, the *Ethics*, and their interrelations because it is precisely these two books which brought about the common reactionary accusation of atheism by Spinoza's contemporaries.[4] Addressing Spinoza's 1663 book, *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy* [*Renati des Cartes Principia philosophiae* (*DPP*)], Bayle writes: "Spinoza appears as orthodox in that book about the nature of God."[5] Bayle designates his target quite specifically: "[Spinoza's] *Tractatus Theologico Politicus*, printed in Amsterdam, in the year 1670, is a pernicious and execrable book which contains all the seeds of the Atheism he plainly discovered in his *Opera Posthuma*."[6] François Lamy, in his 1696 *Le nouvel athéisme renversé*, also focused on the *Ethics* and the *TTP* in his attack on Spinoza's atheism.[7] Bayle's reference to the *Opera Posthuma* is ostensibly targeting the *Ethics* at least primarily, if not uniquely. Even the most suspicious and distrustful mind would have to labor hard in order to find atheism in the *Hebrew Grammar*, or even in the *Tractatus politicus* where Spinoza argues that it is not within the power, and hence right, of the commonwealth to induce people to adopt *utterly absurd beliefs*, such as "that the whole is greater than its part or *that God does not exist*."[8] The *TTP* and the *Ethics* are the works where Spinoza launches his merciless attack on anthropocentric thinking and anthropomorphic religion. Spinoza's panentheism (E1p15: "*quicquid est, in Deo est*") constitutes the metaphysical foundation of the *Ethics*, and it is repeatedly and clearly alluded to in the *TTP*.[9] Since it is these two elements—(1) Spinoza's open assertions of panentheism and (2) his critique of anthropomorphic conceptions of God—which are the historical grounds for the atheism charge, it seems natural that the merit of this charge should be decided primarily by examination of these two foundational works.

I will proceed in the following manner. In the first section of the chapter, we will make our first acquaintance with the imputation of atheism by Spinoza's contemporaries and Spinoza's response to the charge (or lack thereof). In the second section, I discuss three broad hermeneutic strategies that have been pursued to impute atheism to Spinoza. The first of the three was dominant in Spinoza's time, while the latter two were employed more recently. These strategies are not mutually exclusive and we can find occasionally various combinations of different shades of these three strategies. In this section, I will also raise some preliminary questions about the cogency of the hermeneutics employed by each strategy. In the third and fourth sections of the chapter, I will discuss a small selection of key

[4] On the reactionary nature of the imputation of atheism by Spinoza's contemporaries, see Garrett, *Nature and Necessity*, 17.

[5] Bayle, "Spinoza" in *Dictionary Historical & Critical*, vol. v, 206.

[6] Bayle, "Spinoza" in *Dictionary Historical & Critical*, vol. v, 203.

[7] Lamy, *Le nouvel athéisme*, 34–72 and 235–7. Cf. Stetter, "Cartesian Refutation," 5.

[8] *TP* 4.8 (G III/287/C II 520). Italics added.

[9] I discuss some of these *TTP* passages in Melamed, "The Metaphysics of the *Theological Political Treatise*," 133–7. Another important passage is *TTP* 6 (G III 83, note/C II 154n4).

texts from the *Ethics* and the *TTP*, respectively, and argue that the atheist readings fail to make sense of these key passages (unless one adopts a hermeneutics of extreme suspicion which could equally find any view harbored in any text). Let me stress that this selection of passages is far from comprehensive, and that dozens of other passages can be adduced to establish the very same point. I hope by the end of the fourth section to convince the reader of the deep problems besetting the atheist readings. In the fifth and last section, I show that both panentheism and the critique of anthropomorphic religion and anthropomorphic conceptions of providence were quite common within Jewish-Rabbinic discourse. Thus, I will argue that if we are not in the business of announcing that both Maimonides and the Kabbalists were atheists, we should avoid the same imputation to Spinoza. Underlying my argument in this final section is the claim that some perceptions of Spinoza as an atheist result from conceptual violence, i.e. from the enforcement of the categories of a hegemonic culture (in this case, Western Christianity) on minority cultures (in the current case, rabbinic Judaism). To be clear, this attitude need not be motivated by ill intentions or racism. It is always tempting and easy to explain the unfamiliar through the familiar, but conceptual stagnation and insistence on imposing the categories of the familiar on other cultures may quickly lead to deep distortion and blindness, despite one's best intentions. Unless one is exceedingly careful to avoid the—completely natural—temptation to impose one's own categories on a foreign culture (and to look for the coin *only* under the street light), one is likely to end up with distorted conceptions of the relevant alien culture, despite one's fair motives.

In one of the epigraphs to this article, Heine charges Spinoza's reactionary contemporaries with malice for accusing Spinoza of atheism. Thank God malice is not at stake in the current celebration of Spinoza as an atheist. *What is at stake is what counts as a genuine religious view*. While in the past, the rejection of Jewish anti-anthropomorphic panentheism as a genuine religious view was frequently motivated by bigotry (hence Heine's condemnation), the current imputation of atheism stems, arguably, from an ideological bent and disregard of a vast body of rabbinic literature. Both can be addressed amicably.

2. "Those Who Do Not Blush to Accuse Philosophers of Atheism"

In my introduction, I claimed that the *TTP* and the *Ethics*, Spinoza's two major books, are also the primary causes for the imputation of atheism. We should note, however, that the *first* accusations of atheism predate the publication, and probably the writing, of the *TTP*. In an October 1665 letter, Spinoza informed Henry Oldenburg of a "treatise on my opinion about scripture" that Spinoza was composing and of the three chief reasons which motivated him to do so. The second

of the three reasons concerned "the opinion the common people have of me [*opinio, quam vulgus de me habet*]; they never stop accusing me of atheism" [Ep 30, Spinoza to Oldeburg, October 1, 1665 (G IV 166/C II 14–15)]. Given this statement, one could expect the *TTP* to address and refute the charge of atheism, but it is barely mentioned in (the final version of) this work. Spinoza seemed to conclude that it was pointless to debate with the rabble, and thus at the beginning of the *TTP* he writes:

> I care little of the snarls of the superstitious [*parum curans, quid superstitio ogganniat*], who hate no one more than those who cultivate true knowledge [*veram scientam*] and true life. Sadly, things have come to this: people who openly confess that they have no idea of God, and that they know God only through created things (whose causes they are ignorant of), do not blush to accuse Philosophers of Atheism. [*TTP* 2 (G III 29–30/C II 94)]

'*Vulgus*' and '*superstitio*' are two of the most pejorative terms in Spinoza's vocabulary, and Spinoza employs these terms as he refuses to engage the accusation; a philosophical debate with the *vulgus* is a waste of anyone's time. In §3 below, we will return to the last passage in order to spell out Spinoza's claim that his accusers know God "only through created things" (ultimately, this is a counter-accusation of idolatry), but, for now, let us have a quick look at some insightful claims by Leon Roth, an outstanding scholar of both Maimonides and early modern philosophy who attempted to explain Spinoza's brushing off the atheism accusation:

> Spinoza may well have considered himself safe from the charge of atheism which has been advanced against Maimonides for his denying human knowledge of God. A God indescribable in imaginational terms will never be recognized by the majority of mankind. "You say," writes his friend Boxel, "that you deny human attributes of God in order not to confuse the nature of God with that of man. So far, I approve. We do not perceive the way in which He wills and understands, considers, sees, and hears. But if you deny categorically the existence of these activities and the validity of our highest thoughts of God, and affirm that they are not in God, even in the 'eminent' and metaphysical sense; then I do not understand your God—*tuum Deum ignoro*—nor what you mean by the word."[10] And Spinoza can only point out, in reply, the old truth which he had learned from Maimonides: any imaginational attribute has significance only in relation to the ascriber; and there is no more objective reality in the human description

[10] Ep 55, Boxel to Spinoza, October/November 1674 (G IV 255/C II 417–18). The translation in this quote is by Roth.

> of God advanced by Boxel than there would be in a mathematical description given, say, by a triangle, if it happened to be articulate.[11]

Hugo Boxel—whose letter to Spinoza Roth cites—was genuinely perplexed by Spinoza's views. Boxel was a legal scholar and politician; in terms of philosophical acumen, he does not seem to have been the sharpest pencil in the box, and Spinoza's attitude toward him is somewhat condescending.[12] Boxel, however, is not at all malicious. He really cannot understand what kind of God Spinoza has in mind if that God cannot see or hear or have other human perfections 'eminently' [Ep 55, Boxel to Spinoza, October/November 1674 (G IV 256/C II 418)]. For Boxel, Spinoza is going too far in rejecting the ascription of *any* human perfection to God. While Boxel does not accuse Spinoza of atheism, one can easily see how a less friendly person—who like Boxel assumes that ascribing some human perfections to God is essential to religion—would accuse Spinoza of atheism. Part of the issue here is the context against which Spinoza's views are examined. As I will later show, radical rejection of the ascription of *any* human perfection to God was quite common in the rabbinic context, not only among Maimonides' abundant philosophical followers, but also among many Kabbalists who adopted Maimonidean negative theology in their discourse about the *Ein-Sof*, the most intimate and true layer of the divinity.[13]

One last text I wish to discuss in the context of the early accusation of atheism by Spinoza's contemporaries is a letter by Lambertus van Velthuysen whom Curley aptly describes as a "defender of the new philosophy (of both Descartes and Hobbes)" who was also a member of the Walloon Church.[14] Velthuysen was quite shocked by the claims of the *TTP*, and most of his letter addresses Spinoza's audacious assertions about scripture and Christ. Towards the letter's end, Velthuysen draws some general conclusions:

> Here, most Distinguished Sir, you have a brief account of the main points of the teaching of this Theologico-politician. In my judgment his teaching destroys and completely subverts all worship and religion, *secretly introduces Atheism*, or at least imagines a God who cannot move men to reverence for his Divinity. His God is subjected to fate; no room is left for any divine governance or providence; the whole distribution of punishments and rewards is destroyed. At least it's easy to see from the Author's writing that the authority of the whole of Sacred

[11] Roth, *Spinoza, Descartes, and Maimonides*, 119. For Spinoza's triangle example, see Ep 56: "I believe that if a triangle could speak, it would say in the same way that God is triangular in an eminent way [*eminenter*]" [Ep 56, Spinoza to Boxel, October/November 1674 (G IV 260/C II 421)].

[12] When Boxel states that he believes in the existence of masculine, but not feminine, ghosts, Spinoza asks him whether he ever checked their underwear [Ep 54, Spinoza to Boxel, October 1674 (G IV 251/C II 413)].

[13] For a clear example of such an attitude by a Kabbalist, see Yosef Ergas, *Shomer Emunim*, 78.

[14] C II 365.

> Scripture is shattered by his reasoning and arguments, and that it is mentioned by the Author *only for the sake of the appearances.* [Ep 42, van Velthuysen to Ostens, 24 January 1671 (G IV 218/C II 385)]

Velthuysen's words are carefully crafted. The heretical or unorthodox nature of the *TTP* is salient even from the very surface of the text, but the same cannot be said about atheism. Here Velthuysen hesitates ("or at least imagines a God who cannot move men to reverence") and avails himself of a hermeneutics of suspicion ("secretly introduces atheism," "only for the sake of appearance"). Moreover, the letter immediately continues and concludes with an attack on Spinoza's rejection of the exclusivity of the "oracles given to the Jews and Christian" and his implied willingness to recognize the Koran too as the Word of God [Ep 42, van Velthuysen to Ostens, January 24, 1671 (G IV/218, 24–32/C II 385)]. Why would an atheist strive to recognize specifically the Koran—rather than any other randomly picked book—as the Word of God? In order to answer this question, we will turn shortly to examine the use of the term 'atheist' in the seventeenth century. Let me just briefly note that Spinoza provides a remarkable response to Velthuysen's hesitant accusation, but we will postpone discussing this response till the very end of the chapter.[15]

3. Three Strategies for 'Atheism'

The term 'atheist' was used quite liberally in the early modern period. In his 1648 disputation on atheism, the important Utrecht Calvinist theologian Gisbertus

[15] An early source I have not discussed in this section is the testimony of the Augustinian Friar, Tomas Solano y Robles. After a visit to Amsterdam in late 1658, Brother Tomas was interviewed by the Inquisition in Madrid, which was attempting to gather information on the community of the former *conversos* in Amsterdam. In his report, Tomas describes his meeting in Amsterdam with two outcasts of the Jewish community: Juan de Prado and Benedict de Spinoza. According to Brother Tomas, Spinoza (and de Prado) "thought that God exists only philosophically" (Revah, *Spinoza et Juan de Prado*, 32). Tomas describes De Prado as a physician and Spinoza as "a good philosopher." Thus, I suspect that the claim about the 'mere' philosophical existence of God was more closely associated with the philosopher between the two. But does it make sense for a philosopher to say that "God exists *only* philosophically," thus implying that philosophical existence is *not* existence in the full sense of the word? By analogy, think about the testimony of a lay person who describes a philosopher of language as "quarrelling about the *mere* meaning of words." A report of this latter kind seems to qualify as an indication that the lay person has hardly any clue about what kind of inquiry is conducted by philosophers of language. Returning to Brother Tomas, we know that Tomas describes Spinoza as an atheist, though he quotes the philosopher as claiming that God exists philosophically. Are we not witnessing here a case of a *vulgus*, misapprehending a conception of God that is free from anthropomorphic thinking? We can pose the same question from a slightly different angle. Assuming that Spinoza truly believed in the inexistence of God, why should he say that "God exists *only* philosophically"? Did he believe that philosophy does *not* provide an adequate account of existence? Finally, let me note that the oldest biography of Spinoza (commonly attributed to Lucas) stresses that Spinoza went through a relatively less severe form of *Herem*, since "he was not convicted of blasphemy [*blasphemé*], but only of want of respect for Moses and for the Law" (Wolf, ed., *Oldest Biography*, 53). Presumably, genuine atheism would count as blasphemy in seventeenth-century Jewish Amsterdam.

Voetius notes that the term is used in a broad and "calumnious sense."[16] For some early modern writers, 'atheism' was just a term for aberrant religious behavior. Thus, for example, Ioannes Caramuel y Lebkowitz (1606–82), an impressive Spanish polymath and theologian, speaks about the "the atheism of the rabbis."[17] According to Voetius, what the various branches of atheism share is the divergence "direct or indirect from the proper knowledge of God, a real faith and a just worship of God which may be accompanied with attempts to remove religion and morality from themselves or from others."[18] Among Renaissance and early modern figures who were accused of atheism by their contemporary foes, we find not only Pomponazzi, Descartes,[19] and Leibniz,[20] but also Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, and Erasmus.[21] "In the sixteenth century, two savants and two theologians could not dispute without accusing each other reciprocally of sodomy and atheism," writes Théophile Gautier sardonically.[22] According to Don Cameron Allen, in this period:

> [A]n atheist was one who could not accept any religious principle shared by all Christian creeds. A Jew, a Mohameddan, a deist was an atheist, and the definition could be narrower: to many Protestants, the Pope was the chief of Roman Catholic atheists; to many a Roman Catholic, Canterbury was the head of the Anglican atheists.[23]

That Spinoza made it into the list of seventeenth-century 'atheists' is not a surprise. Both his rejection of anthropomorphic religion and his panentheism clearly made his views about religion aberrant to many. Spinoza quickly realized that 'atheism' may well be employed as a term of abuse rather than a serious accusation of genuine denial of God's existence. Hence, Spinoza's first response to Velthuysen's accusation does not at all address his beliefs about God: "atheists are accustomed to seek honors and riches immoderately. But I have always scorned those things. Everyone who knows me knows that" [Ep 43, Spinoza to Ostens, February 1671 (G IV 219b/C II 386)]. Moreover, in chapter six of the *TTP*, Spinoza puts to work his high learning curve by accusing *his* opponents that their belief in miracles "would make us doubt everything and would lead to atheism" [TTP 6 (G III 87/C II 159)].

[16] Voetius, *Disputationum*, 116–26. Cf. Krop, "Atheismus," 164–6.
[17] See his preface to the 1657 Hebrew translation of Aquinas' *Summa contra gentiles*, Aquinas, *Kitzur*.
[18] Voetius, *Disputationum*. Translated in Krop, "Atheismus," 165.
[19] In Ep 43, Spinoza to Ostens, February 1671 (G IV 219b–26b/C II 385–90), Spinoza points out to Ostens that Descartes was accused of atheism by Voetius (G IV 220b/C II 386). Cf. Verbeek, "Problem of Atheism."
[20] Berkeley, *Theory of Vision*, §6, in *Philosophical Works*, 282.
[21] Kors, *Atheism in France*, 7–8.
[22] Gautier, *Les grotesques*, 71. Translated in Kors, *Atheism in France*, 20.
[23] Allen, *Doubt's Boundless Sea*, vi.

More than anything, this common and excessively easy use of the term 'atheist' in the early modern period is an indication of narrow-mindedness and intolerance. If the *only* legitimate concept of God is *my* concept, then it may well be the case that Spinoza, Descartes, "the Rabbis," the Pope, and the Archbishop of Canterbury are all 'atheists.' All that is needed to justify this use of the term is that I vehemently deny the concepts of God entertained by each of the members of this disreputable list.

Were Boxel and Velthuysen exemplifying such a narrow-minded attitude? I tend to think that at least in the case of Boxel, we can explain his thinking by simple ignorance rather than intolerance. Boxel seems to be unfamiliar with a genuine religious tradition that refuses to ascribe *any* human perfection to God, and it is this inadequate knowledge that led to his perplexity as he was trying to understand Spinoza's views. For our purposes, I would like to designate the term, the 'narrow-minded strategy,' for the hermeneutic path for imputing 'atheism' to Spinoza (and the Pope, etc.) which we have discussed in the last two pages, no matter whether this strategy is motivated by intolerance, or innocuous ignorance. We will return to discuss this strategy later in the chapter, but for the time being, let me just note that in the sense defined in the past few pages, *Spinoza (and the Rabbis) are indeed atheists* (i.e. they hold aberrant religious views in the eyes of many).

I turn to the second hermeneutic strategy for imputing atheism to Spinoza. The question of Spinoza's alleged atheism depends significantly on what kind of *theos* is at stake. We have plenty of textual evidence showing that Spinoza did not believe in a God who is the supreme king of the world and who judges, punishes, and loves his creatures. One might think that it was just Spinoza's harsh critique of such conceptions of the divine that led Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi—who otherwise had some occasional insightful readings of Spinoza—to describe Spinoza as an atheist.[24] It is worth noting, however, that immediately after pronouncing Spinozism as atheism, Jacobi adds that "the philosophy of the Kabbalah…is nothing but undeveloped or newly confused Spinozism."[25] Thus, relying on the transitivity of identity, we may infer that, for Jacobi, *the Kabbalah* is nothing but undeveloped, or confused, atheism. It would thus seem to follow that millions of observant Jews who follow Kabbalistic theories and rituals, pray three times a day, and spend fifteen hours a day studying Talmud are just a bunch of…confused or clandestine atheists. And this conclusion does seem somewhat too odd.

Spinoza's critique of anthropocentrism and anthropomorphic religion played an important role in shaping Jacobi's view of Spinoza, but the latter was also molded by Jacobi's fideistic view of the relationship between faith and reason. For Jacobi, Spinoza was the consistent rationalist who made no concessions in

[24] Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 233 [*Werke*, I/1, 120].
[25] Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 233–4 [*Werke*, I/1, 120–2].

adhering to the '*a nihilo nihil fit*' principle.[26] Consistent Leibnizianism, says Jacobi, leads back to Spinoza.[27] The only escape from the tyranny of Spinozistic rationalism was a fideistic leap of faith.[28] Jacobi was clearly aware of the numerous passages in the *Ethics* that are utterly inconsistent with denying the existence of God, but he simply did not believe Spinoza's words. Thus, immediately after asserting that Spinozism is atheism, Jacobi notes:

> I am far from charging all Spinozists with denying God. But precisely for this reason the demonstration that, when properly understood, Spinoza's doctrine does not admit any kind of religion does not seem superfluous to me. A certain Spinozistic froth [*Schaum*] is on the contrary quite compatible with all species of superstition and enthusiasm; one can blow the most beautiful bubbles with it. *The committed atheist should not hide behind this froth; the rest must not be deceived by it.*[29]

It seems that for Jacobi, once Spinoza is recognized as the most consistent explorer of reason, he *must* be an atheist since reason necessarily leads to atheism; if Spinoza's explicit claims are inconsistent with atheism, they *must* be deemed mere deceptions.[30]

In the twentieth century, Jacobi's position was popularized by Leo Strauss, whose 1921 doctoral dissertation focused on Jacobi. "The ultimate justification of Spinoza's critique is the atheism from intellectual probity which overcomes orthodoxy radically by understanding it radically" writes Strauss in the 1962 preface to the English version of his early *Religionskritik Spinozas* (1930).[31] For Strauss, a thinker *cannot* be a citizen of both Athens and Jerusalem. To the extent that Maimonides, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Locke were philosophers, they *must* all be atheists.[32] Strauss's Tertullianian convictions[33] place him in the very same boat with Jacobi and the *vulgus* in accusing Spinoza of atheism. For all three, religion and faith *must* be anthropomorphic, and any talk of a conception of God free from anthropomorphic thinking *must* be deemed mere dissimulation.

[26] Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 187 and 205 [*Werke*, I/1, 18 and 57].
[27] Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 234 [*Werke*, I/1, 121].
[28] Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 189 [*Werke*, I/1, 20].
[29] Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 233, n. 57 [*Werke*, I/1, 120].
[30] Jacobi does not seem to have a reasonable grasp of what is happening in Parts 4 and 5 of the *Ethics*. In a rare reference to these parts, Jacobi dismisses them as texts in which Spinoza hides his real views and "degrades himself into sophistry" (Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 194 [*Werke*, I/1, 28]).
[31] Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, 30.
[32] "Underlying Strauss' argument in *Philosophie und Gesetz* is his belief, inherited from Jacobi, that there is an irreconcilable contradiction between revelation and reason" [Warren Zev Harvey, "Historiography"]. On Maimonides' atheism per Strauss, see Kraemer, "The Medieval Arabic Enlightenment," 138. On Strauss's view of Locke as atheist, see Zuckert, "Strauss' Return," 97–8.
[33] Harvey ("Historiography") aptly notes that Strauss's Tertullianism "was unprecedented in the historiography of Jewish philosophy."

In the following, I will refer to this path for imputing atheism to Spinoza as the 'Straussian strategy.' It consists of two crucial elements. First, it *assumes*—I am not aware of anything remotely similar to a serious argument for this view in Strauss's writing on the subject—the irreconcilability of reason and belief in God.[34] Then, in a resulting second step, it brushes off the numerous passages throughout the *Ethics* which contradict this view as "appeasing terminology" whose aim is "to hide rather than reveal Spinoza's real starting-point."[35] The air of grand conspiracy theory is salient in every page of Strauss's discussion of Spinoza, and one may well respond to it by noting that while it is difficult to prove the logical impossibility of such theories, the kind of radical suspicion hermeneutics employed by Strauss could be equally deployed to show that the *Ethics* is clandestine Masonic text, or, if you wish, a hitherto unknown version of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

Still, every hypochondriac is sometimes sick and it is also true that occasionally, Spinoza is writing between the lines. Can we point out clear differences between Spinoza's between-the-lines writing and Strauss's conspiracy theories? I think we can, and shortly we will look closely at a small selection of texts and consider the viability of a Straussian reading of these texts. For the time being, let me just note that in the vast majority of cases, the "esoteric" meaning behind Spinoza's between-the-lines writing is in fact quite clear. Consider, for example, Spinoza's notes on the Trinity. When Spinoza claims that "we *cannot* form any clear and distinct concept of it" [*CM* 2.8 (G I 264/C I 330); italics added], and that "what theologians understand by the term personality escapes me, but not what philologist understand by that word" [Ep 12a, Spinoza to Meyer, 26 July 1663 (C I 206)], it is difficult *not* to realize that for Spinoza, this doctrine is unintelligible. Were Spinoza to claim in a similar manner that God's existence cannot be clearly and distinctly conceived, or even more mildly, that one can know God only through faith, but not through demonstration, the Straussian reading might have had a case. Alas, Spinoza *never* made such claims. On the contrary: on numerous occasions, he insisted that God's existence can be demonstrated in the most strict and precise manner.

I turn now to the third and last path for imputing atheism to Spinoza which I will henceforth call the "*redundancy strategy*." The core of this strategy is the claim that Spinoza's identification of God and Nature makes God completely redundant in his ontology. The most lucid and serious case for this strategy has been made recently by Steven Nadler.[36]

[34] A Straussian would most likely suggest that one should not even *ask* for such an argument since atheism is a philosophical truth that should not be taught exoterically. I will let the prudent reader—who should also consider Strauss's overall aptitude in analyzing arguments—reach her own verdict on the value of this claim.

[35] Strauss, *Persecution*, 189.

[36] For another variant of this strategy, see Smith, *Spinoza's Book of Life*, 42–3, who also follows Strauss' path. Jonathan Israel's contribution to the current volume also adopts the redundancy strategy. My criticism of Nadler below should apply mutatis mutandis to Smith and Israel as well.

The concept of God is at the very core of Spinoza's philosophy (both in the *Ethics* and in the *TTP*), and thus, any serious attempt to interpret Spinoza as an atheist must explain both the interpreter's own understanding of the concept of God and what Spinoza understood by this crucial notion. In his characteristically lucid and transparent manner, Nadler provides the following account of what Spinoza means by 'God.'

> Spinoza certainly does *not* mean by 'God' what the Judeo-Christian religious tradition means by 'God.' In the first place, the God of Judaism and Christianity is a transcendent being, ontologically distinct from the world it creates; Spinoza's God is not a supernatural being that stands outside of the world; God *is* nature.[37]

The essentialist characterization of the so-called 'Judeo-Christian God' as transcendent and the contrast drawn between the alleged Judeo-Christian God and the Spinozist God seems crucial for Nadler's argument and for this reason it deserves close attention. While I commend the forthrightness of this passage, I believe it contains several critical inaccuracies and odd assertions.

(1) The notion of the "Judeo-Christian tradition" had a problematic political pedigree even before it was deployed by neo-conservative circlers, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, as part of an argument for the exclusion of Muslims, but I will not dwell on that here. For our purposes, the crucial question is what the analytical value of this notion is. It might, perhaps, make sense to claim that the beliefs that Abraham was the father of Isaac, that Isaac was the father of Jacob, and that all three were pious people, are shared by both Christians and Jews (and Muslims). It is highly misleading, however, to claim that there is a Judeo-Christian concept of God. In fact, it is even misleading to speak about a "Jewish" concept of God. As I will argue in §5 below, rabbinic sources *never* developed a consensus—or anything remotely close to a consensus—about the true nature of God. Some, like Maimonides, held that God has no physical features whatsoever, others argued that God is present in every inch of space, while still others claimed that they can tell you the precise measures of God's *finite* bodily organs (such as his right hand).[38] In fact, it was Spinoza himself who observed that even among biblical authors there is a huge variety of

[37] Nadler, *Spinoza's 'Ethics'*, 113.

[38] Responding to Maimonides' claim that whoever believes that God is corporeal is a heretic, Rabbi Avraham ben David of Posquières, one of the most prominent rabbinic commentators on Maimonides' *Code* writes: "Why did Maimonides call such a person a heretic? Better and more important scholars [than Maimonides] adhered to the view that God is corporeal" (see his commentary in Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, Book of Science, Laws of Repentance, ch. 3, §7). Importantly, Avraham ben David himself did not believe that God is corporeal, but thought it was improper to delegitimize such views.

conceptions of God, and that Moses' concept of God was very different from that of the Patriarchs.[39]

(2) One of the best illustrations of the radical diversity of Jewish conceptions of God concerns the issue of God's transcendence. Even just within the Bible, there are passages which assert that God is separate from—or above—nature, but also many passages which assert that God *fills* nature. Consider, for example, Jeremiah 23:24: "For I fill the heavens and the earth [את השמים ואת הארץ אני מלא]." Talmudic literature is replete with both transcendent conceptions of God and strongly anti-transcendent conceptions of God. Thus, for example, we are told that Rav Sheshet, a Babylonian Talmudist who was blind, would ask his assistant to prepare him for prayer by placing him facing any direction other than east in order to avoid the practice of certain local idolaters who used to pray to the east. Yet, Rav Sheshet would always explain to his assistants that this is *not* because God is not present in the east. On the contrary, he would insist, God is everywhere and in every direction of space.[40] In medieval rabbinic literature, the view that God is present in all of space is abundant and can be found in numerous texts and in almost all strata of this literature, from philosophy, through sermons, liturgy, Bible commentaries, to the Kabbalah. The Zohar, the canonical and foundational text of the Kabballah, states in a typical formulation: "God surrounds all the worlds, and no thing surrounds him…*none can be outside him*; he fills all the worlds and nothing else fills him [איהו סובב כל עלמין, ולית סובב לון…ולית מאן דנפק מרשותיה לבר, ולית אוחרא ממלא לון]."[41] Moses Cordovero, the major sixteenth-century Kabbalist, argues that since everything is in God, we must admit that whenever we feed ourselves with plants and animals, "we consume nothing but the divine."[42] Closer to Spinoza's home, in early seventeenth-century Amsterdam, we find the Kabbalist, Abraham Cohen Herrera, the teacher of Spinoza's teachers, asserting that not only do all *actual* things and places reside in God, but even all *possibilia* are in God.[43]

The few brief examples just cited are just drops from a huge bucket. We will return later to discuss rabbinic views on pantheism and panentheism, but for the time being, I can only say that the claim that the "Jewish God" must "stand outside of the world" is patently false. One cannot simply brush away the *Zohar* as a non-essential text.

[39] See, for example, *TTP* 2 (G III 35, 37, 42; 42/C II 100, 102–3, 108, 109); *TTP* 13 (G III 169/C II 260).

[40] *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Baba Bathra, 25b. I am indebted to Jonathan Garb for pointing out this source.

[41] *Zohar*, III 225a (Ra'aya Meheymana). Italics added.

[42] Cordovero, *Shiur Koma*, 32.

[43] Herrera, *Gates of Heaven*, Book II, ch. 1.

(3) Transcendence and immanence are indeed opposed characteristics, but one may well *consistently* conceive of God as having some aspects, that are transcendent, while others are immanent. Shortly, I will argue that Spinoza held this very view, and that the mainstream of the Kabbalah asserted it as well.

(4) In the quote above, Nadler contrasts the alleged Judeo-Christian conception of God as transcendent with Spinoza's affirmation that "God is Nature." The problem with this contrast is that "God is Nature" was a slogan affirmed by numerous Kabbalists and rabbinic texts. So much so, that in a recent article, Moshe Idel, the eminent Kabbalah scholar, suggested that Spinoza might have adopted this slogan from Kabbalistic sources.[44] Should we disregard the Kabbalah and the other rabbinic sources affirming the identity of God and Nature because they do not fit the alleged "Judeo-Christian conception of God"? Why?

Let us turn now to the claim that Spinoza's God adds nothing to his ontology of nature. The context of the following passage is Nadler's attempt to disassociate Spinoza from what he calls "immanentist pantheism," i.e. the view that "God is distinct from the world but nonetheless ubiquitously contained" in it, just like "water is contained in a soaked sponge."[45] According to Nadler:

> Spinoza explicitly tells us that God is "immanent" in Nature, he clearly is not a pantheist in the first immanentist sense. The phrase 'God or Nature' is intended to assert a strict numerical identity between God and Nature, and not a containment relationship. God is not "in" nature in such a way that nature contains, in addition to its natural contents, a distinctive divine and supernatural content.[46]

Spinoza's God, according to the last passage, is nothing over and above nature, and as such it seems to add nothing to Spinoza's ontology. In order to address the claims of the last passage it would be helpful to clarify a certain ambiguity in our use of the term 'immanence.' Does Spinoza ever tell us that "God is 'immanent' in nature"? The terminology of immanence is used by Spinoza in one, and only one, context, i.e. as a qualification of the notion of an efficient cause. An immanent cause [*causa immanens*] is just a sub-category of the efficient cause. Specifically, an immanent cause is an efficient cause whose effect inheres in the cause. As such, it is contrasted with the notion of 'transient cause' [*causa transiens*], which is an efficient cause whose effect does not inhere in the cause.[47] Spinoza indeed

[44] See Idel, "*Deus sive Natura*."
[45] Nadler, *Spinoza's 'Ethics'*, 118.
[46] Nadler, *Spinoza's 'Ethics'*, 118.
[47] See E1p18d. Cf. Burgersdijk, *Institutionum logicarum libri duo* (1644), Book I, ch. 17, §§6ff., p. 66 (I'm indebted to Dan Garber for the last reference). For recent scholarship, see Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 61–6; Garrett, "Spinoza's *Conatus* Argument, 157, n. 31; and Nadler, "Whatever Is," 64.

explicitly claims that God is the immanent cause of all things (E1p18), but this means that *all things are in God* (or inhere in God), and not that *God is in all things* (i.e. nature). The direction of the *in alio* relation is highly important, since it denotes strong, asymmetric ontological dependence, and it is one thing to claim that the totality of finite things depends on God, and completely another thing to say that God depends on the totality of finite things. Spinoza asserts the former, and openly rejects the latter.[48]

In the passage above, Nadler is using the term 'immanent' in its twentieth- (or twenty-first) century sense, as something which is inside the world, or is part of nature.[49] This sense of 'immanent' has some vague similarity with Spinoza's use of the term, though, in order to avoid confusion, we must be keenly aware that this is not Spinoza's use of the term.

It is in the latter, twenty-first century sense of 'immanence' and 'transcendence' that Spinoza's God is commonly described as immanent, and not transcendent. By a transcendent God, we normally understand a divinity that has at least some aspects which are beyond our world and beyond what we can experience.[50] Thus, the radically transcendent God of negative theology is wholly beyond our grasp and access, while the providential God of many religious communities is only partly transcendent since he acts in the world.

Against the common slogan that Spinoza's God is immanent, I would argue that Spinoza's God has significant transcendent features. He is not as transcendent as the God of negative theology, but barring this exception, Spinoza's conception of God is arguably one of the most transcendent notions of the divine. Let me explain this scandalous claim.

Spinoza's God (or Nature) has infinitely many attributes (E1d6). We live in, and are familiar with, only two of these infinitely many attributes: Extension (the realm of bodies and motion), and Thought (the realm of ideas and volitions).[51] Each of the infinitely many unknown attributes of God are just as real as Extension and Thought. Yet, Spinoza has solid reasons for the claim that we have no causal and cognitive access to any of these infinitely many unknown attributes.[52] Thus, it is only a tiny fraction of the complete reality of God (or Nature) that we know, or may know. The remaining infinitely many unknown attributes of God are completely beyond our grasp, i.e. they completely transcend the world *as we know it*.[53]

[48] See E1p1.

[49] Kant's use of the term in the First Critique is close—though not identical—to the twentieth-century sense. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B352.

[50] See 'transcendent' in the *Oxford Dictionary & Thesaurus*, 1623.

[51] E2a5: "We neither feel nor perceive any singular things except bodies and modes of thinking."

[52] See Ep 64, Spinoza to Schuller, July 29, 1675 (G IV 277–8/C II 439) and Ep 66, Spinoza to Tschirnhaus, August 18, 1675 (G IV 280/C II 440–1). For a detailed explanation, see Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 156–64.

[53] Notably, Jacobi claimed that Spinoza could not be serious in asserting that God has infinitely many attributes (or any attributes beyond thought and extension) (Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 357). Once one denies the reality of the infinitely many attributes, it becomes much easier to assert the non-transcendence of Spinoza's God.

But isn't Spinoza saying repeatedly that God *is* Nature? And is this claim not a statement of identity? I answer both questions positively. However, I would argue that here we use the term 'nature' in a certain equivocal sense. In some cases, we understand by 'nature' the world *we* experience, i.e. the realm of bodies and minds. In other cases, we use 'nature' as denoting Spinoza's substance which has *infinitely* many attributes. To avoid this confusion, I suggest that we reserve 'nature$_{Ours}$' for the world of bodies and minds which we encounter in our experience and science, and use 'nature$_{Spinoza}$' to denote Spinoza's substance with its infinitely many attributes. One place where Spinoza draws our attention to this possible equivocation is in a note he added to the sixth chapter of the *TTP*.

> NB: By Nature here I do not understand only matter and its affections, but in addition to matter, infinite other things. [*TTP* 6 (G III 83, 10/ C II 154)][54]

The context of this note makes clear that the "infinite other things [*alia infinita*]" are just the infinite attributes.

Spinoza's God is identical with nature$_{Spinoza}$, yet nature$_{Ours}$ is just two of the infinitely many attributes of Spinoza's God.[55] Spinoza's God does not transcend nature$_{Spinoza}$, but it does transcend nature$_{Ours}$.[56] If you wish, we may state the very same point by claiming that nature$_{Spinoza}$ *transcends* nature$_{Ours}$. Thus, while I agree that *Deus sive Natura* can be legitimately read as an identity claim, it is absolutely crucial to realize that these are not just the realms of bodies and minds that constitute nature which is said to be identical with Spinoza's God. With the exception of Thought and Extension, all the other infinitely many attributes of *Deus sive Natura*, transcend everything *we experience* as nature.

Another way to state the last point relies on the distinction between pantheism and panentheism. If pantheism asserts the identity of God and Nature (qua the totality of bodies and minds), panentheism states that all bodies and minds are in God, yet they do not *exhaust* God, since there are aspects of God beyond physical and mental nature.[57] Spinoza is a panentheist—rather than a pantheist—since the infinitely many unknown and inaccessible attributes and their modes transcend the world we experience. This is not merely a matter of our inability to *know* the attributes. We cannot have any *causal* interaction with these infinitely many layers

[54] Spinoza's distinction is merely similar, but not identical, to the one I draw above, since he considers 'nature' in its narrow sense to be referring *only* to Extension, while my 'nature$_{Ours}$' refers to Extension and Thought (i.e. ideas representing Extension).

[55] Gueroult stresses the very same point: "…la Nature, à la quelle Dieu est identifié, n'est pas la matière, mais comprend dans son unité indivisible, outre l'Etendue, essence indivisible des corps, une infinité d'autres genres d'être" (Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, 223).

[56] Shortly, I will show that the absolute infinity of *Deus sive Natura*$_{Ours}$ is grounded in Spinoza's definition of *God* (rather than the concept of nature which is not defined in the *Ethics* and is quite marginal in the proofs of Part 1 of the *Ethics*).

[57] The terms 'pantheism' and 'panentheism' were coined by Toland (*Socinianism*) and Krause (*Gewissheit*), respectively. For a detailed discussion of the distinction between pantheism and panentheism, see Melamed, "Nature of Pantheism," and Melamed, "Grammar."

of existence. These other attributes of God are just as real as Extension and Thought, and yet we have no ontological (and cognitive) access to them. Thus, almost all of God's infinitely many attributes are not only not present in our world of extended and thinking nature, but they cannot even affect anything in our experience. What can be more transcendent than that?

According to Nadler, "even the atheist can, without too much difficulty, admit that God is nothing but nature."[58] I very much doubt this, since the atheist presumably denies the reality of God, while affirming the reality of nature. Thus, the two *cannot* be identical. Perhaps one might suggest that Spinoza was an atheist *disguising* himself as a pantheist (here we are seamlessly switching to the Straussian strategy).[59] Thus, one might argue that Spinoza expressed a nominal and disingenuous commitment to the existence of a fully naturalized God for political reasons, i.e. in order to avoid the charge of atheism. This suggestion would not work as well, since the religious credentials of pantheism in early modern Christian Europe were not much better than those of the atheist, and Spinoza was keenly aware of this fact.[60] It would have been quite foolish on Spinoza's side to attempt to avoid religious persecution by pretending to be … merely a pantheist.

The final step in Nadler's *redundancy strategy* is the suggestion that the true difference between pantheism and atheism lies in the emotional attitude one has toward God/Nature. According to Nadler, the pantheist shares with all other theists the reverential and fearful attitude toward God/Nature, while the atheist views nature in unadorned, prosaic, terms.[61] This is an interesting suggestion, though *pace* Nadler, I believe this very consideration should lead to the conclusion that Spinoza is not an atheist.[62] Whereas Nadler asserts that "Spinoza clearly does *not* believe that the proper attitude to take toward nature is worship, awe, or reverence,"[63] I would argue that the cases of worship, on the one hand, and awe and reverence, on the other hand, should be considered apart: Spinoza would reject worship of nature,[64] yet he exhibits an attitude of awe and reverence toward God/Nature, awe and reverence which are not much different from the proper attitude Maimonides (and many other rabbinic authors) would suggest is proper toward God.[65]

[58] Nadler, *Spinoza's 'Ethics'*, 119.

[59] In correspondence, Nadler clarifies that he "does not think Spinoza modified his language in the *Ethics* to engage in political niceties," or in other words that he does not accept the Straussian strategy.

[60] See Ep 73, Spinoza to Oldenburg, December 1, 1675 (G IV 307, 5–6/C II 467): "I favor an opinion concerning God and Nature *far different* from the one Modern Christians usually defend." Italics added.

[61] Nadler, *Spinoza's 'Ethics'*, 119–20.

[62] Interestingly, Bennett, of all people, argues that Spinoza viewed "Nature as a fit object for reverence, owe, and humble love" (*A Study*, 34).

[63] Nadler, "Recent Work," 514.

[64] Though, like Maimonides, he would allow worship of the anthropomorphic God as an accommodation to the psychology of the masses.

[65] In Maimonides' case, this owe and reverence should be directed not only toward God, but also toward the *intellect*. See Maimonides, *Guide* III:52.

A central distinction within rabbinic religious ethics which can be traced to early Mishnaic literature distinguishes between two types of awe toward God: *fearful awe* [*ira't ha-onesh*] vs. *awe of sublimity* [*ira't ha-romemut*].[66] Fearful awe is just the awe one might have toward God as the judge who is certain to punish sinners for their misdeeds. This is clearly not an attitude Spinoza expects a philosopher to exhibit toward God/Nature. However, this is also not an attitude Maimonides (or any of the rabbinic sources he relies upon) would consider as proper toward God. Fearful awe, Maimonides would claim, is an attitude one should teach to children and uneducated people who are, allegedly, incapable of conceiving God in non-anthropomorphic manner.[67] Religious practice out of fearful awe is *permissible*, claims Maimonides, either as an educational first step toward a higher conception of God, or as a realistic compromise with the limited cognitive capacities of most people.[68] Awe of *sublimity* is, according to Maimonides, the proper attitude one should exhibit toward God, once one cleansed his mind from anthropomorphic thinking.[69] Do we have any evidence of Spinoza conceiving God/Nature as the proper object of our feeling of the *sublime*?

We will shortly return to this question as we pursue a very brief study of key passages in the *Ethics*. For the time being, let me tentatively summarize our findings so far. It is agreed that Spinoza is vehemently opposed to anthropomorphic conceptions of God.[70] We also agree that Spinoza identifies God with some concept of nature, and that discussions of God permeates all of Spinoza's philosophical works. The atheist interpretations seem to think this is mere "language that *seems* deeply religious,"[71] while "in substance, Spinoza is an atheist."[72] I believe that it is virtually impossible to make sense of some of the most fundamental claims of both the *Ethics* and the *TTP* without ascribing to Spinoza genuine commitment to the conception and existence of a non-anthropomorphic God in which everything that is—is. I will not argue with the partisans of the 'narrow-minded strategy' for imputing atheism to Spinoza, since—as I have noted before—in this use of the term 'atheist' Spinoza *is* an atheist (as are Maimonides, 'the rabbis', and perhaps even the Pope). In the following two sections we will examine a

[66] See, for example, *Mishna*, *Tractate Avot*, I 3. Cf. Luzzatto, *Path of the Upright*, ch. 16, 144.

[67] See Maimonides, "Preface to Chapter Heleq," in *Haqdamot le-Perush ha-Mishna*, 113–17, and *Mishne Torah*, Book of Science, Laws of Repentance, ch. 10, §§1–5. Cf. *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Pesachim, 50b.

[68] "Since not all human beings are capable of apprehending the truth, and thus reaching the rank of Abraham, our father, it was *permitted* for the multitude to perform the commandment out of mere of hope for reward and fear of punishment" [Maimonides, "Preface to Chapter Heleq," in *Haqdamot le-Perush ha-Mishna*, 116–17. Italics added; the translation is mine]. Spinoza entertains a similar attitude in his discussion of the seven dogmas of universal faith (*TTP* 14 [G III 177–9/C II 268–70). The crucial distinction between awe of sublimity and awe of fear is central to many works of rabbinic ethics. See, for example, Moshe Hayim Luzzato, *Mesilat Yesharim*, ch. 24.

[69] For an insightful discussion of the Awe of Sublimity in the ethics of Rabbi Moshe Hayim Luzzato (1707–46), see Garb, "From Fear to Awe."

[70] Nadler, *Spinoza's 'Ethics'*, 114–17.

[71] Nadler, *Spinoza's 'Ethics'*, 120. Italics added.

[72] Nadler, *Spinoza's 'Ethics'*, 121.

selection of key passages and claims from both the *Ethics* and the *TTP* attempting to determine which reading provides a better reading of the text.

4. The Evidence of the *Ethics*

4.1 Absolute Infinity

Spinoza's definition of God at the opening of the *Ethics* is, arguably, the deepest foundation of the immense conceptual structure of the entire book:

> E1d6: By God I understand a being *absolutely infinite*, i.e. a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence.
>
> Exp.: I say *absolutely infinite*, not infinite in its own kind; for if something is only infinite in its own kind, we can deny infinite attributes of it [NS: (i.e. we can conceive infinite attributes which do not pertain to its nature)], but if something is absolutely infinite, whatever expresses essence and involves no negation pertains to its essence.[73]

Absolute infinity is the essential characterization of Spinoza's God. In E1d6 and its explication, Spinoza spells out the notion of a being absolutely infinite [*ens absolute infinitum*] as being a substance consisting of infinitely many attributes, each of which is infinite in its own kind. Now, let's assume Spinoza were an atheist. As he clearly admitted, he was familiar with only two of God's/Nature's infinitely many attributes, i.e. Extension and Thought.[74] Under these conditions, it would perhaps make sense for Spinoza to claim that though we know only two attributes of nature, nature *might have* more attributes, perhaps even infinitely many attributes. But this is not what he is saying. Spinoza categorically and unhesitatingly asserts that God *has* infinitely many attributes.[75] Why make this extremely strong claim about nature having infinitely many unknown attributes, when all the empirical data we have about nature is explainable by the mere existence of Extension and Thought? There is indeed a clear *religious* tradition that ascribes to God infinitely many attributes,[76] but the atheist clearly rejects this religious tradition. So why should she commit herself to this extravagant claim that has no ground in anything we know about nature? I am not aware of any text in which Spinoza even attempts to explain why nature must have infinitely many

[73] Italics added. [74] See E2a5.
[75] For a detailed critique of Bennett's claim that Spinoza is not committed to the existence of any attributes beyond Extension and Thought, see Melamed, "Infinity of Attributes."
[76] See Melamed, "Crescas and Spinoza," 212.

attributes. Perhaps there is one. But at this point, it seems that the *onus probandi* is on the side of the atheist readings, since there seems to be a very clear religious tradition and motivation for ascribing absolute infinity and infinity of attributes to God. If Spinoza's reject the religious notion of God as being with infinitely many attributes, why does he make the extravagant claim that Extension and Thought are not everything that is?

4.2 Awe of the Sublime

Both in the *Ethics* and in his letters, Spinoza asserts the existence of an unbridgeable gap between God and created things.[77] We have already met Hugo Boxel and his assertion that one should not completely deny all human perfections from God (see §1 above). In the following passage Spinoza responds to one of Boxel's arguments in favor of the existence of spirits, or ghosts:

> Your second argument is that because spirits are more like God than the other, corporeal creatures, it is also probable that God created them. Truly, I confess I still don't know in what respect spirits are more like God than other creatures are. *I know this: that there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite; so the difference between the greatest, most excellent creature and God is the same as that between the least creature and God.* [Ep 54, Spinoza to Boxel, October 1674 (G IV 253, 5–11/C II 415); italics added]

According to Spinoza's claims in the last passage there is no incremental way to go from finite things to God. The infinite is always beyond (and always equally beyond). Let us return now to the question of whether Spinoza would allow for a psychological attitude of *awe of sublimity* toward God/Nature. The modern discipline of western aesthetics, with its focus on the normative evaluation of feelings, would be launched a few years after Spinoza's death. From its very inception, the feeling of the sublime stood at the very center of this discipline. But what is the proper object which should create in us this feeling? In his celebrated discussion of the sublime in the Second *Critique*, Kant suggests it is "the *absolutely great* [*absolute, non comparative magnum*]" or "that *which is great beyond all comparison*."[78] Kant's view is partly indebted to Edmund Burke's highly influential treatise *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Here is Burke's claim about the most proper cause of our feeling of the sublime:

[77] For the *Ethics* passage, see E1p17s (G II 62–3).
[78] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, Ak. 5:248. Emphases in the original.

> *Infinity* has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is *the most genuine effect and truest test of the sublime*.[79]

For both Burke and Kant, infinity is the paradigmatic object of the feeling of the sublime. Burke and Kant developed their aesthetic theories relying on widely received societal perceptions of human feelings. Thus, it seems that in the opening of the *Ethics*, Spinoza chooses to define God/Nature through the superlative ("absolute") instantiation of infinity which the leading early modern theoretician of the sublime believed to be the most proper object of this feeling. Would not Spinoza's God "fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect and truest test of the sublime"? Would not that feeling of the sublime count as an instance of "an attitude of awe and reverence toward nature" (or God), an attitude Nadler claims Spinoza "clearly" does not have?[80]

4.3 Eternity

Shortly after defining God, Spinoza presents the following definition of eternity:

> E1d8: By eternity I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing.
>
> Explication: For such existence, like the essence of a thing, is conceived as an eternal truth, and on that account cannot be explicated by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end.

There are several intriguing features in this definition, not the least of which is its patent circularity. In another work, I argue that eternity—as defined in E1d8—is really a *modal* notion; more specifically, eternity is self-necessitated existence.[81] I will not assume this reading in the following. For our purposes it would suffice to note that in the *explicatio* of E1d8, Spinoza openly denies that eternity could be equated with existence in all times, or everlastingness.

Intriguingly, in an earlier work, Spinoza opens a space for a certain "second best" notion of eternity—eternity as everlastingness—*as long as it is not applied to God*:

> So we pass to the second question and ask whether what *has been created could have been created from eternity*.
>
> To understand the question rightly, we must attend to this manner of speaking: "from eternity." For by this we wish to signify here something *altogether different*

[79] Burke, *Of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Part II, §9. Italics added.
[80] Nadler, "Recent Work," 514.
[81] Melamed, "Eternity," 152–62.

> *from what we explained previously when we spoke of God's eternity*. Here we understand nothing but a duration without any beginning of duration, or a duration so great that, even if we wished to multiply it by many years, or tens of thousands of years, and this product in turn by tens of thousands, we could still never express it by any number, however large. [*CM* I, 10 (G I 270/C I 336)]

According to this passage, the eternity of "what has been created" is "altogether different" from God's eternity. In another passage in the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, Spinoza stresses again that strict eternity "is to be attributed to God alone," while created things can at most be everlasting [*CM* I, 1 (G I 252/CI 318)]. Similarly, in the *Ethics*, too, Spinoza asserts that eternity insofar as it involves the necessary existence of E1d8 "is the very essence of God" (E5p30d).

Now, suppose Spinoza were a concealed atheist: Why should he attribute to *nature* this kind of existence that does not belong to created things? According to Nadler, "Spinoza did not elevate nature into the divine. On the contrary, he reduced the divine to nature."[82] Should not the ascription of strict eternity (and absolute infinity) to God/Nature count as elevation of nature into the divine?

4.4 The Nature of Nature

In the course of arguing for his variant of the atheist reading, Nadler makes the following string of claims:

> Spinoza's fundamental insight in Part One is that Nature is an indivisible, infinite, uncaused, substantial whole, in fact, it is the *only* substantial whole. Outside of Nature there is nothing, and everything that exists, is part of Nature.[83]

There seem to be several inaccuracies in this passage. In Part 1 of the *Ethics*, Spinoza never claims that either God or Nature is *uncaused*, but rather that God/Nature is causa sui. Similarly, I do not think Spinoza can allow for any substantial whole given his proof of the indivisibility of substance (Ep12). More important, it is worth noting that all of the qualities discussed in the passage above (indivisibility, infinity, self-causation, etc.)[84] are *not* inferred from Spinoza's definition of *nature*, for the simple reason that the *Ethics* contains no such definition.[85] Spinoza put much effort and time in crafting precisely the key terms of his metaphysics, *but 'nature' is not one of these terms*. Given the great care Spinoza invested in

[82] Nadler, "Whatever Is," 70.
[83] Nadler, *Spinoza's 'Ethics'*, 114.
[84] Cf. Nadler, "Whatever Is," 70.
[85] I am not aware of any other text in Spinoza's corpus in which he provides a definition of 'nature' simpliciter. In E1p29s, he defines and distinguishes *natura naturans* from *natura naturata*, and roughly the same distinction appears in *KV* I, 8 (G I 47, 20/C I 91) as well.

elucidating his key terms, it would be odd for him to reduce the concept of God to that of nature because *the notion of nature plays a very marginal, if any, role in the demonstrations of the* Ethics. Thus, for example, Spinoza did not prove that *nature* is infinite because such a proof would normally require an explication and definition of the nature of nature. It seems that Spinoza did not find this question urgent throughout the almost two decades during which he was composing the *Ethics*.

4.5 Proving the Existence of…Nature?

In E1p11d, Spinoza presents a series of intricate and highly sophisticated proofs for the existence of God. Most of these proofs are original and not mere rearrangements of the proofs presented by predecessors such as Descartes, Maimonides, or Anselm.[86] The rigorous establishment and elucidation of the various claims upon which these proofs rely is the main task of the propositions preceding E1p11. Now, were Spinoza an atheist, aiming at simply reducing God to nature, this entire venture would seem to be absolutely pointless, for how could it make any sense to prove that *nature* exists? Who denies that? Do we have *any* textual evidence showing that Spinoza entertained the slightest worry about the existence of nature?

The Straussian might perhaps suggest that the aim of Spinoza's proofs of God's existence was merely political, i.e. that these proofs merely aimed at relieving him from the suspicion of atheism, and that he was not truly committed to their content. Indeed, Strauss himself suggests that Spinoza's argument for the existence of God "hides rather than reveals his real starting-point,"[87] and that we should search Spinoza's writings, and especially the *TTP*, in order to find "Spinoza's concealed atheistic principles" which are the true ground of the book.[88] But, if the aim of the proofs of God's existence was merely political, why use these highly sophisticated and original arguments which the *vulgus* was hardly capable of appreciating?[89] Why not endorse instead one of the traditional and widely received arguments? Moreover, if one is willing to dismiss the beginning of Part 1 of the *Ethics* as a masked political argument that should not be taken too seriously, why should we consider the rest of the book—which relies heavily on the opening of the *Ethics*—as a serious and genuine work of philosophy?

[86] For a penetrating critique of the claim that Spinoza's first proof in E1p11d is a mere restatement of Anselm's ontological proof, see Garrett, "Spinoza's 'Ontological' Argument."

[87] Strauss, *Persecution*, 189.

[88] Strauss, *Persecution*, 189.

[89] According to Strauss, the *Ethics*'s arguments for God's existence are merely meant "*ad captum vulgi loqui*" (*Persecution*, 189). Frankly, Strauss's *vulgus* seems to easily outsmart Strauss himself, who shows no traces of genuine understanding of the ingenuity of the arguments at the beginning of Part One of the *Ethics*.

4.6 Order of Philosophizing

In E2p10—"The being [*esse*] of substance does not pertain to the essence of man, or substance does not constitute the form of man"—Spinoza argues against the Cartesian conception of man as a substance. The scholium to this proposition begins with questioning a common conception of the notion of essence as the set of qualities necessary for the existence of a thing.[90] Spinoza then turns to the crucial issue of the "proper order of philosophizing." Spinoza's claims here are quite radical since he is not merely asserting—like some of his predecessors—that God is prior to everything else both ontologically and epistemologically, but that even the order of *discovery*, the point of departure from which we initiate the philosophical exploration, *must begin with God*. The core of Spinoza's argument in this passage is that if we begin philosophizing by contemplating first finite things, and only then ascending to the knowledge of the infinite, we are doomed to misunderstand both the infinite and the finite things. The reason for this double failure is, briefly, that it is impossible to know finite things without the infinite on which they depend.[91] Complementarily, we will fail to know the infinite too, since after contemplating finite things, we would naturally attempt to conceive of the infinite in the image of the finite things with which we are acquainted.[92] Here is the passage in its entirety:

> The cause of this, I believe, was that they did not observe the [proper] order of Philosophizing. For they believed that the divine nature, which they should have contemplated before all else (because it is prior both in cognition[93] and in nature) is last in the order of cognition, and that the things that are called objects of the senses are prior to all. That is why, when they contemplated natural things, they thought of nothing less than they did of the divine nature; and when afterwards they directed their minds to contemplating the divine nature, they could think of nothing less than of their first fictions, on which they had built the cognition of natural things, because these could not assist cognition of the divine nature. [E2p10s (G II 93–4/C I 455)]

Now, how could we understand this passage under the atheist readings? Why would an atheist criticize those who "contemplated natural things" without first understanding "the divine nature"? Isn't this—i.e. knowing natural things

[90] In contrast, Spinoza would argue that the essence of a thing is both necessary *and sufficient* for the "givenness" of a thing. See E2d2 and the end of E2p13s.

[91] Cf. E1a4 and E2p45d. I discuss this issue in detail in my "Review of Ayers."

[92] Ultimately, the danger here is anthropomorphizing God, i.e. conceiving God in the image of (the best) finite thing we know.

[93] I have slightly amended Curley's translation, rendering '*cognitio*' as 'cognition' rather than 'knowledge', since Spinoza allows for inadequate *cognitio*.

without presupposing God—precisely what the atheist wholeheartedly recommends? And why would an atheist complain that the "cognition of natural things" could "not assist the cognition of the divine nature"? Or, if we wish to pose an even more basic question: Why should an atheist insist that the divine nature should be "contemplated before all else"? One cannot answer the last question by suggesting that the phrase was just obscure and meant merely to assert the priority of the whole of nature, for two trivial reasons. First, for Spinoza, the divine nature, or *natura naturans*, is indivisible (see E1p12 and Ep13), and thus, is not a whole. Second, Spinoza's basic mereological premise is that parts are prior to their wholes, both in nature *and in cognition*.[94] Interestingly, Spinoza himself felt that the issues raised in the last excerpt evince the absurdity of accusing him of atheism:

> Sadly, things have come to this: people who openly confess that they have no idea of God, and *that they know God only through created things (whose causes they are ignorant of)*, do not blush to accuse Philosophers of Atheism. [*TTP* 2 (G III 30, 2–5/C II 94); italics added]

The texts we have examined in this section of the chapter belong to the core strata of the *Ethics* and cannot be brushed off as marginal and unimportant assertions. We can adduce more passages of this kind. In fact, much of Part Five of the *Ethics* and its discussion of salvation is barely intelligible under the atheist readings. Let us see now whether these readings fare any better with the *TTP*.

5. The Evidence of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

5.1 Knowing by Natural Light that God Exists

In chapter 5 of the *TTP*, Spinoza discusses the reasons and import of religious ceremonies and the belief in religious narratives. In the latter context, he writes:

> Someone who is not familiar with [the religious narratives], and nevertheless knows [*novit*] by the natural light that God exists…that person is completely blessed [*beatum omnino esse*]. *Indeed, he is more blessed than the common people* [*vulgus*], *because in addition to true opinions* [*veras opiniones*], *he has a clear and distinct conception.* [*TTP* 5 (G III 78/C II 149)]

Normally, we would read this passage as presenting a contrast between the *vulgus*' cognition of God's existence through opinion [*opinio*]—the lowest kind of cognition[95]—that might happen by coincidence to be more or less true,

[94] See E1p12d, *CM* II 5 (G I 258/C I 324), and Ep 35, Spinoza to Hudde, April 10, 1666 (G IV 181/C II 27).

[95] See E2p40s2 (G II 122/C I 478).

and the philosopher's adequate conception of God's existence. Spinoza stresses that both the philosopher and the *vulgus* achieve blessedness, though the blessedness of the philosopher, unlike that of the *vulgus*, is complete. Now, how are we going to read this passage according to the atheistic interpretations? For Spinoza, knowing [*noscere*] by natural light is just non-mystical cognition. The object of this knowledge (in the last excerpt) is…*God's existence*, and the passage qualifies this cognition as "clear and distinct conception." So how can God *not* exist? Perhaps one might suggest that the object of this knowledge is merely the existence of *nature*. However, in such a case the achievement of blessedness seems to be extremely cheap: who does *not* know that nature exists? And why should we deprive the *vulgus* of the very trivial and undeniable knowledge of the existence of nature?

5.2 Knowledge and Love of God

Both in the *Ethics* and in the *TTP* Spinoza repeatedly asserts that humanity's *summum bonum* is the knowledge and love of God.[96] Thus, in the fourth chapter of the *TTP*, Spinoza writes:

> The idea of God dictates this: that God is our supreme good, *or* that the cognition and love of God is the ultimate end toward which all our actions ought to be directed. In spite of this, the man of the flesh [*homo carnalis*] cannot understand these things. To him they seem hollow [*vana*], because he has too meager a cognition of God, and he finds nothing in this highest good to touch, or eat, or affect the flesh. [*TTP* 4 (G III 61/C II 129)]

Under the atheist readings, this can, at best, assert that knowledge and love of the totality of *nature* is humanity's highest good. Let's assume for a moment that Spinoza's love and knowledge of God is nothing but this kind of devotion to, and love of, nature. Still, we may wonder, why is the "man of the flesh" incapable of entering the naturalist club? We definitely eat, touch, and affect our flesh through interaction with nature. Why do these perfectly natural actions undermine our claim to be lovers of nature?

5.3 The Tetragrammaton as Indicating God's Essence

In chapter 13 of the *TTP*, Spinoza attempts to establish that obedience to God does not require adequate knowledge of God. To prove this claim he points out that the Patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—who were clearly obedient and

[96] See, for example, E4p28, E4app4, E5p20d, and *TTP* 4 (G III 60/C II 128).

pious, had no knowledge of God's true name, the Tetragrammaton (Ex. 6:3). Spinoza then glosses:

> Note that there is no name in Scripture except the Tetragrammaton which *makes known* the absolute essence of God [*Dei absolutam essentiam*], without relation to created things. And therefore, the Hebrews contend that only this name of God is peculiarly his, the others being common nouns. *And really* [*et revera*], the other names of God, whether they are substantives or adjectives, are attributes which belong to God insofar as he is considered in relation to created things or is manifested through them. [*TTP* 13 (G III 169/C II 259); italics added]

Notice that the '*et revera*' phrase in the fourth line of the passage discloses Spinoza's *agreement* with the contention of "the Hebrews" that only the Tetragrammaton indicates God's true essence.[97] But how could an atheist—who denies God's existence—tell us which name of God truly indicates the "absolute essence of God"? Spinoza clearly understands the Tetragrammaton, according to its Hebrew verb for being, *haya* [היה], as indicating pure *existence*, or as expressing in one single word "the three times of existing" [*TTP* 2 (G III 38/C II 104)]. In this way, Spinoza's agreement with the so-called Hebrews' understanding of the Tetragrammaton amounts to the claim that God's essence is nothing but existence, a claim Spinoza explicitly asserts in the *Ethics* (E1p20). But if Spinoza is an atheist, i.e. denies God's existence, why should he assert that God's essence is existence, i.e. that God necessarily exists?

5.4 The Seven Principles of Faith

In chapter 14, Spinoza presents his seven principles [*dogmata*] of universal faith, principles that are necessary for obedience and public peace. Elaborating on these principles, Spinoza stresses that "it doesn't matter, as far as faith is concerned" [*TTP* 14 (G III 178/C II 269)] how precisely these principles are interpreted, and then provides a list of *pairs* of interpretations of such principles. Notice that each pair consists of an anthropomorphic interpretation, consistent with the religion of the *vulgus*, and *a philosophical, non-anthropomorphic, interpretation which represents Spinoza's own views*. Here are the pair of interpretations of principle [iii]:

> Again, it also doesn't matter, as far as faith is concerned, if someone believes
>
> [iii] that God is everywhere according to his essence or according to his power [*TTP* 14 (G III 178/C II 269)].

[97] Cf. *TTP* 13 (G III 169/C II 259–60). For a detailed discussion of this passage, see Melamed, "Deification of Existence," 84–7.

In the case of principle [iii], the claim that God is everywhere according to his essence amounts to panentheism (or pantheism), while the claim that God is everywhere only according to his power is roughly the common providential conception of God as the omnipotent sovereign of all reality (asserting God's power over everything that is).[98] Now, if Spinoza were an atheist (denying any concept of God), why should he bother at all to suggest a philosophical, non-anthropomorphic, conception of God as an alternative to the conception of the *vulgus*? What is the philosophical or political value of this move? Philosophically, the atheist is supposed to deny the very existence of God no matter whether he is everywhere by essence or by power.[99] Politically, it would also be a folly for Spinoza to try to disguise himself as merely…a pantheist, i.e. radical heretic (in the eyes of his Christian contemporaries).

5.5 "I Am the Lord Your God."

Addressing the first two commandments of the Decalogue which assert God's existence and prohibit the worship of anything else (Ex. 20:2 and Duet. 5:6), Spinoza writes:

> That's also why the Decalogue was a law only in relation to the Hebrews, because of a defect in their knowledge. *For since they did not know God's existence as an eternal truth, they had to perceive as a law what was revealed to them in the Decalogue: that God exists and that he alone is to be worshipped.* If God had spoken to them immediately, without using any corporeal means, they *would have perceived this, not as a law, but as an eternal truth.* [*TTP* 4 (G III 63/C II 132); italics added]

For Spinoza, perceiving something as an eternal truth is perceiving it truly and rationally, while perceiving a content as divine legislation is the result of anthropomorphic thinking and defective cognition.[100] For our purposes, it is crucial that the passage above clearly asserts that God's existence and "that he alone is to be worshiped" *can* be perceived also as eternal truths. But eternal truths are true and fully rational. Hence, we have clear evidence for a fully rational conception of God's existence (and of the requirement to "worship him alone").

[98] Cf. Descartes's 1649 letter to More: "I think that God is everywhere in virtue of his power; yet in virtue of his essence he has no relation to place at all" (AT V 343/CSMK III 373).

[99] The introduction of the distinction between anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic conceptions of God makes sense under the assumption that Spinoza denies the veracity of the former, but not of the latter, but still allows both the false and the true conceptions to be part of public religion, as long as either one might lead to obedience. If, however, Spinoza denies the veracity of any conception of God, the distinction is absolutely pointless.

[100] See Melamed, "Against the Law."

What kind of atheist would assert that God's existence and the requirement to worship him alone is such an absolutely obvious, eternal truth?

There are numerous other passages in the *TTP* that are hardly intelligible under the atheist readings,[101] unless one engages in Strauss-style fanciful conspiracy theories which virtually divorce the text from its meaning. I can only invite the reader to open the book and simply read it slowly and carefully while considering whether it is possible to make sense of this text on the assumption that its author was an atheist.

6. "The Rabbis"

In §§3 and 4 we have studied a wide selection of key texts from both the *Ethics* and the *TTP* which could hardly be reconciled with the view of Spinoza as an atheist. Many more texts can be adduced, both from the aforementioned two books and from Spinoza's other works and correspondence.[102] It is now time to reconsider why we were led to the conjecture that Spinoza was an atheist in spite of the clear testimony of the texts (such as Spinoza's elaborate and highly sophisticated proof of God's existence at the beginning of the *Ethics*). There seemed to be two chief reasons that led us to the atheism conjuncture. On the one hand, we had the Straussian claim that insofar as Spinoza was a philosopher he *could* not genuinely assert the existence of God. I am not sure this claim deserves a response because no argument was made to motivate it. Once the Straussian will launch an argument in support of the claim that a philosopher cannot assert the existence of God, there will be a point in responding to it. Without a motivating argument, it is questionable whether the Straussian assertion is at all part of a philosophical discourse.

Another motivation to impute atheism to Spinoza was Nadler's claim that Spinoza's use of the term 'God' is utterly opposed to "what the Judeo-Christian religious tradition means by 'God'." I have argued before that the suggestion that there is a Judeo-Christian concept of God is both wrong and highly misleading. Here I wish to return to this issue and elaborate briefly.

Rabbinic Judaism never developed a definitive theology. According to Leon Roth, "dogmalessness [is] the only dogma in Judaism."[103] I would doubt even that. The most significant attempt to establish Jewish principles of faith was carried out by Maimonides in his "Preface to Chapter *Heleq*" and the thirteen principles

[101] See, for example, *TTP* 6, ADN 6 (G III 252/C II 156) and *TTP* 14 (G III 179/C II 270).

[102] One such text which I have briefly mentioned before is Spinoza's discussion in chapter 3 of his late and incomplete work, the *Tractatus politicus*, where atheism is referred to as an example of an absurd belief (next to the belief that the whole is not greater than its part) which even the most powerful sovereign *cannot* force one to affirm [*TP* 3.7 (G III 287/C II 520)].

[103] Roth, "Fundamentalism and Judaism," 9.

delineated therein. The two most salient features of this attempt were its populist nature (i.e. it was meant to be propagated among the masses) and its colossal failure (these principles were accepted by some, explicitly rejected by many, and radically reinterpreted by others). With regard to the first feature, we may only note that a common joke among Maimonides scholars is that the real question regarding these principles is whether Maimonides believed in seven or only six of his thirteen principles. It is also worth stressing that Maimonides' thirteen principles appeared in his early and popular Commentary on the Mishna, and that in his mature philosophical masterpiece, the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides did not even bother to *mention* these principles.

In the absence of binding theological dogma, it is quite common to find within rabbinic literature widely diverse and even opposed views on numerous theological issues. The questions of anthropomorphism and pantheism/panentheism are no exceptions. Here, I will focus on the two issues of (1) critique of anthropomorphism and (2) pantheism/panentheism, because it is precisely Spinoza's views on these two issues which might seem to scholars unfamiliar with the rabbinic context as being far beyond the pale.

Mainstream early modern rabbinic and Kabbalistic figures recurrently endorsed Maimonides' critique of anthropomorphic religion. Some of these *establishment* rabbinic figures would go as far as restrict divine knowledge of particulars,[104] and express sympathy toward and understanding of the denial of providence on the part of the "philosophers."[105] As both Leibniz and Warren Zev Harvey have separately noted, Spinoza's iconoclastic attack on the assertion, that "all things were created for the sake of man and man that he might worship God,"[106] is at least partly adopted from Maimonides' *Guide*. Post-Maimonidean rabbinic sources were sharply divided in their evaluation of the radical views of Maimonides.[107] Let us turn now to the issue of panentheism.

Panentheistic views were common in rabbinic literature, and almost ubiquitous among the Kabbalists. In a celebrated responsum, Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Ashkenazi (1656–1718), perhaps the leading Rabbinic authority in Europe at his time, had been asked to evaluate the legitimacy of the assertion—made by David

[104] See Ergas, *Shomer Emunim*, 92a. *Shomer Emunim* is one of the most canonical and mainstream texts of the Kabbalah. In 1756, "the Council of Four Lands" announced a major ban, prohibiting the study of Kabbalah before the age of 40. Only three texts were excluded from this ban, and *Shomer Emunim* was one of three. The fact that the book restricts divine knowledge of particulars did not bar it from being designated a canonical text, beyond suspicion.

[105] See Kahana and Silber, "Deists, Sabbateans, and Kabbalists," 357 and 362. The author of this sermon is Ezekiel Landau, the chief rabbi of Prague and one of the most important rabbinic authorities of the eighteenth century.

[106] The quote appears in Leibniz's marginalia on the *Guide*. See Goodman, "Maimonides and Leibniz," 233. For Spinoza's claims, see E1app (G II 79/C I 441). Cf. Harvey, "Teleology and Anthropocentrism," and Melamed, "Teleology in Jewish Philosophy."

[107] Compare, for example, the views of Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov, Crescas, and Ibn Gabbai (Melamed, "Teleology in Jewish Philosophy," 131–5).

Nieto, a local rabbi in London—that "God, may He be blessed and nature, and, nature and God, may He be blessed—are all one [השי״ת והטבע והטבע והשי״ת הכל אחד]." In his responsum, Ashkenazi admits that he cannot even understand the very posing of the question ["ואני שמעתי ולא אבין תלונות העוררין עליו"] since the identity of God and nature is a well-established principle of the Kabbalah ["חכמת האמת"].[108] The most Ashkenazi could make of the bizarre complaint against the identification of God and nature is that such an identification might perhaps involve some odd idolatrous cult of particular physical items. Ashkenazi immediately rejected this suspicion, noting that it would be absurd to ascribe such gross cultism to a serious scholar and rabbi such as Nieto. Remarkably, *the suspicion that the identification of God and nature was a statement of—or a foil for—atheism did not even pass through Ashkenazi's mind*, since he was acquainted with similar assertions by numerous pious and righteous kabbalists.[109]

For the most part, medieval and early modern rabbinic figures had hardly any anxieties about endorsing panentheistic (and, occasionally, pantheistic) views. It is not only that physical nature was considered to be in God, but even human minds and souls were deemed part of God. Thus, Moshe De Leon, the editor (or author) of the *Zohar* argues that the punishment of sinners in the afterlife cannot be severe, since human spirits are in the most concrete sense ("ממש") in God, and self-infliction is cruel and unbefitting of God.[110]

In Jewish Amsterdam of Spinoza's time, we find Menashe ben Israel attempting to explain the human mind's relation to the body as analogous to God's relation to the world: "Our Rabbis of blessed memory said: just as God fills the entire world, so does the soul fill the entire body. What they meant by this saying is that just as God is *wholly in the entire world*, and *wholly* in every part of the world, so too the pure soul is wholly in the entire body, and wholly in every part of it."[111] In his correspondence with Clarke, Leibniz accuses Clarke and Newton of tacitly embracing the heretical view of God as the World-Soul,[112] a view Leibniz associates with Spinozism.[113] Unlike Leibniz, Menashe ben Israel seems to be perfectly content to not only assert an analogy between God's presence in the world and the soul's presence in the body, but even to assert that God fills the world in a holomeristic manner ("whole in a whole and a whole in every part"). Apparently, heresy just

[108] Ashkenazi, *Shut Hakham Zvi*, Question 18.

[109] Ashkenazi, *Shut Hakham Zvi*, Question 18. As far as I can tell, medieval theological anxieties about pantheism did not consider it atheistic, but rather as constituting, or leading to, idolatry (see, for example, Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 3, a. 4, objection 1). Notably, in the rabbinic context, even in the modern period, the few critiques of pantheism/panentheism charged it with idolatry, not atheism. See, for example, the 1796 attack of Rabbi Elijah of Vilnius against the panentheism of the Hassidim (Wilenski, *Hassidim u-Mitnagdim*, 188).

[110] Moshe De Leon, *Mishkan ha-Edut*, part 4, quoted in Eliyahu ha-Kohen, *Midrash Talpiot*, 81a.

[111] Menashe Ben Israel, *Nishmat Hayim* (1652), 125. Italics added. I have used this quote as one of the epigraphs of the current chapter.

[112] See Leibniz' second (§12) and fourth (§27) letters in *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*.

[113] Vailati, *Leibniz and Clarke*, 44, 89, and 202, n. 58.

like pornography is (also) a matter of geography; a doctrine that would be heretic for Leibniz and Bayle,[114] would be deemed perfectly orthodox for ben Israel and many other rabbinic figures.

In the printed edition of the Sabbath sermons of Rabbi Saul Mortera, one of Spinoza's teachers in the Portuguese Jewish community of Amsterdam, we find the midrashic formula "God is the place of the world, but the World is not His place [הוא מקומו של עולם ואין העולם מקומו]"[115] stated repeatedly.[116] As Scholem pointed out, this formula has been commonly considered a statement of panentheism.[117]

Early modern rabbinic sources were barely afraid of asserting panentheism. So much so, that Rabbi Yacov Yosef ha-Kohen of Polonne (1710–82), one of the founders of the Hassidic movement, would bring rabbinic panentheism to its ultimate conclusion by suggesting that, truly, *every idol* is divine since God is present in space in its *entirety*.[118]

In his celebrated 1969 paper, Quentin Skinner noted the risk of a "mythology of parochialism" whenever we insist on understanding an alien culture in terms of our own.[119] The danger of parochiality is far stronger when we deal with a hegemonic culture—in our case, western Christianity—that is not willing to recognize the contingency, historicity, and, yes, the *particularity* of its own categories. It is, I suspect, this kind of concealed parochialism that leads authors to impose the categories of western Christianity on rabbinic Judaism without ever doubting the adequacy of such a move. Far from adhering to any imaginary concept of the non-immanent God of the "Judeo-Christian religious tradition," early modern traditional Jewish sources exhibit a wide range of such concepts. Many, perhaps even most, of these sources would express agreement with Spinoza that "whatever is, is in God," and many of these sources would concur with Maimonides' and Spinoza's claim that anthropomorphic conceptions of God involve the mere assimilation of the true conception of God to the crude ways of thinking of the common people. If we are not in the business of denouncing (or praising) both Maimonides and the Kabbalists[120] as atheists, we should better refrain from imputing atheism to Spinoza due to his unfamiliar religious views.

[114] "The doctrine of the soul of the world is…at bottom the same with that of Spinoza" (Bayle, "Spinoza," note a, in *Dictionary*, vol. 5, 200).

[115] *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 68:9.

[116] Mortera, *Givat Shaul*, 61, 142, 143, and 152.

[117] Scholem, "Kabbalah," 649.

[118] Yakov Yosef ha-Kohen of Polonne, *Ben Porat Yosef*, 99a. *Ben Porat Yosef* is the second Hassidic book to be printed (1782).

[119] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," 24.

[120] In Ep 73 Spinoza himself points out the agreement of his views on God's relation to nature with those of "the Ancient Hebrews, as far as can be conjectured from certain traditions [*ex quibusdam traditionibus*], corrupted as they have been in many ways" [Ep 73, Spinoza to Oldenburg, December 1, 1675 (G IV 307/C II 467)]. '*Traditionibus*' is the literal translation of the Hebrew word 'Kabbalah [*קבלה*]' and the view of the Kabbalah as body of corrupted philosophical doctrines was widespread in early modern Europe. Therefore, it is highly likely that this passage refers to mainstream Kabbalistic panentheism, and thus attests to Spinoza's own recognition of his proximity to Kabbalistic

7. Conclusion

Discussing Spinoza's alleged atheism, Leo Strauss laments the change in the perception of Spinoza's views of God. "While former generations publicly denounced Spinoza as an atheist, today it is almost a heresy to hint that."[121] More than anyone else, the person who was responsible for the late eighteenth-century change in the evaluation of Spinoza's views of God was Salomon Maimon (1753–1800). Responding to Jacobi's charges that the Kabbalah is "undeveloped Spinozism" and that Spinozism is atheism, Maimon argues that "the Kabbalah is, in fact, nothing other than an *extension* of Spinozism."[122] Moreover, claims Maimon:

> It is hard to fathom how Spinoza's system could have been made out to be atheistic, since the two systems are diametrically opposed. The atheist system denies the existence of *God*; Spinoza's denies the existence of the *world*. Thus, it should really be called *acosmic*.[123]

According to Strauss, the change in the perception of Spinoza's views of God occurred because "the causes of esoterism have almost completely been forgotten."[124] This claim is patently false at least with regard to Maimon, who was highly sensitive to the contemporary political context of writing about Spinoza.[125] The source of the difference between Maimon's and Strauss's opposed views of Spinoza's understanding of God lies elsewhere. Unlike Strauss, who had barely any access to rabbinic literature,[126] Maimon was intimately versed in rabbinic and kabbalistic writing (in his early period, Maimon was a kabbalist). Thus, it is not a coincidence that the person who would initiate the revolution in the perception of Spinoza's view of God had deep familiarity with the world of Kabbalah and

panentheism. For a detailed discussion of Spinoza's engagement with the Kabballah, see my forthcoming paper, "Gates of Heaven."

[121] Strauss, *Persecution*, 189–90.

[122] Maimon, *Autobiography*, 58. I leave the discussion of that point for another occasion.

[123] Maimon, *Autobiography*, 64. Maimon coined the term "acosmism" as the proper description of Spinoza's philosophy in response to the common eighteenth-century imputation of atheism to Spinoza. This view of Spinoza as a radical religious thinker who denies the reality of the world and asserts that only God exists helped initiate a major revolution in the perception of Spinoza among the German Idealists. Maimon himself had espoused a version of acosmism in his early Hebrew manuscript, *Hesheq Shelomo* (e.g. folio 139). See Melamed, "Rise of Spinozism," 79.

[124] Strauss, *Persecution*, 190.

[125] Maimon discusses exoteric and esoteric writing in the context of Mendelssohn's and Leibniz's attempts to distance themselves from any association with Spinoza. See Melamed, "Rise of Spinozism," 86–7 and 95.

[126] According to a story I have heard orally from multiple sources (though I have never seen it in writing), Nehama Leibowich, who would later become a leading Bible scholar, was Strauss's study mate at the Berlin *Hochschule* in the 1920s. At the time, Leibowich was an undergraduate student, while Strauss had finished his Ph.D. and acquired a reputation of being a highly promising future "Jewish philosopher." After a few sessions in which the two studied Talmud together, Leibowich is reported to have asked her friends who precisely is Strauss: "He must be a great philosopher" Leibowich is reported to say, "since in Talmud, he does not understand the basics."

rabbinics. From within that world, it is pretty absurd to assert that panentheism, or the assertion that "whatever is, is in God," is atheism.

Before concluding, it would be eminently fitting for us to reflect briefly on the relationship between the *TTP* and the *Ethics* from the vantage point of the question of Spinoza's "atheism." According to Strauss, the *Ethics* "is a strictly esoteric or scientific" work, while the *TTP* "is, of course, exoteric."[127] The key for understanding the unstated and hidden foundations of the *Ethics*, says Strauss, are the exoteric, atheistic, teachings of the *TTP*.[128] Jacobi sees no opposition between the two works (both assert atheism);[129] Bayle and Lamy seem to concur.[130] On my side, I can note that Spinoza's extant letters provide us with valuable insight into the development and early drafts of the *Ethics*, which we barely have in the case of *TTP*. The *Ethics* was also written during a much longer period than the *TTP*. In terms of the content of the two books, there seem to be some interesting differences between the political and moral theories of the two books, but as far as the concept of God is concerned, I do not see a deep difference between the two works.[131]

Perhaps the most fitting conclusion for this chapter is encapsulated by Spinoza's own words when he is finally willing to address the charge of atheism which he finds patently absurd. Having in mind the sophisticated demonstrations of God's existence at the beginning of the *Ethics*, Spinoza writes: "Who can be so skillful and cunning that he can give, insincerely, so many and such strong arguments for a thing he regards as false? Who, I say, will he afterward think has written sincerely if he thinks fictions can be as solidly demonstrated as truths?" [Ep 43, Spinoza to Ostens, February 1671 (G IV 220b/C II 386)].

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[127] Strauss, *Persecution*, 186–7.
[128] Strauss, *Persecution*, 189.
[129] Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 201 [*Werke*, I/1, 43].
[130] See the introduction to this chapter.
[131] Two important and relevant issues which I have not addressed in this chapter are (1) the role of religion in Spinoza's well-functioning state and society, and (2) Spinoza's attitude toward historical religions. On both issues, the story seems to be somewhat more complicated than the common, textbook tale. Here I can recommend, among others, the important work of Carlisle (*Spinoza's Religion*), Garber ("Politics of Obedience" and his contribution to this volume), and Harvey ("True Religion").

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PART III

LAWS: NATURAL, HUMAN, AND DIVINE

6
Descartes and Spinoza on the Laws of Nature

Edwin Curley

1. Preliminaries

Here are a few things you should know about Spinoza, if you want to understand the essentials of his metaphysics: first, that he thought everything which happens can, in principle, be deduced from the laws of nature, provided you have the necessary information about the prior history of the world; second, that he thought the laws of physics could, in principle, be organized into a deductive system in which, from a few, simple, basic laws, it could be shown that many, less general, and less obvious laws, follow; and finally, that he thought the world must have a causal structure analogous to the logical structure of that system of laws.

I submit that these propositions provide the key to understanding his metaphysics. If you realize that this was Spinoza's view of science and its relation to the world, you will be able to understand what he thought God is, what he thought God's relation to his modes is, why he thought God must have infinite modes; what, in general terms, those infinite modes are and how they are related to finite modes; and finally, why Spinoza's necessitarianism does not commit him to denying that there are possible worlds other than our own. This is not a trivial matter. If I'm right, we have a cogent answer to some the most fundamental and difficult questions about Spinoza's metaphysics.

I've argued for these claims before,[1] but not clearly enough, it seems, to persuade critics. So, Yitzhak Melamed recently characterized my interpretation as "novel," "daring," and "quite astonishing." It therefore required much more textual support than I had given it, including "a detailed explanation of Spinoza's understanding of the laws of nature."[2] Similarly, Eric Schliesser, in his review of a book discussing my work, claimed that my emphasis on the laws of nature was

[1] e.g. in Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics* and Curley, *Geometrical Method*.

[2] See Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, particularly p. 10. Many of Melamed's criticisms echo those made earlier in John Carriero, "Mode and Substance."

"dubious textually," since those laws "do not figure in the official ontology…[or] play much of an explanatory role."[3]

I suppose it's flattering to have my interpretation pronounced daring, even if I don't myself think it was so novel that it should be found astonishing. I have had precursors, as we'll see. But Melamed's suggestion that I support my interpretation with a detailed explanation of Spinoza's understanding of the laws of nature was really quite constructive. The attempt to make things clearer to others and to forestall misunderstandings has led me to a better grasp of the interpretation I first advanced years ago.

In this chapter, I'll offer a 'natural history' of the concept of a law of nature in Spinoza, by which I mean a roughly chronological survey of the main passages where it occurs, which provide the evidence for my interpretation, including passages where it may not be obvious that that concept is at work. Following the argument will require from my readers patience, perseverance, and an open mind. But how could it be otherwise, with a subject like Spinoza? Though I'll focus mainly on the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (*TTP*) and the *Ethics*, I'll also discuss earlier works, like the *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione* (*TIE*) and the *Korte Verhandeling* (*KV*), which I contend are essential to understanding his masterworks.

Before we undertake that survey, though, we need to set Spinoza's writings in their Cartesian context. This will help us to understand not only why there's no anachronism in ascribing to Spinoza a view of the world which makes laws central to his metaphysics but also how criticism of Descartes might naturally have led him to it. I'll begin by discussing the role the laws of nature played in Descartes's philosophy, what Spinoza accepted from Descartes, and what he rejected. Then I'll survey Spinoza's texts, adopting, with some modification, the chronology assumed in my edition of Spinoza's works.[4] The main change I'll make will be to divide my discussion of the *Ethics* into two parts, one coming before the *TTP*, the other after it. I take it that Parts 1 and 2 of the *Ethics* were substantially in place by the summer of 1665 and did not change significantly after that. Parts 3 to 5 came several years later.[5] The recent discovery of a MS of the *Ethics* indicates that it did not undergo substantial revision after the end of 1674.[6]

[3] See Schliesser, "Huenemann Review," 824. The book reviewed is Huenemann, *Interpreting Spinoza*. Both critics also alleged that my interpretation relied on 'the principle of charity,' which they seem to understand as entailing that when we find a great philosopher of the past apparently saying something manifestly false, we should interpret him as saying something twentieth- or twenty-first-century philosophers are likely to think true. I've repudiated charitable interpretation, so understood, in Curley, "Metaphysics Revisited."

[4] C I and C II, which aim to give Spinoza's texts in chronological order, so far as that can be done, given, for example, the length of time in which he worked on the *Ethics*.

[5] This seems to me clear from Fokke Akkerman's work on the text in "Spinoza's *Ethica*," as I argued briefly in C I 405–7. See also Steenbakkers, 'L'historique du texte," in O IV 13–47.

[6] See Spinoza, *Vatican Manuscript*, 5–6.

But first the historical context. The criticism both Melamed and Schliesser make, that my interpretation imposes twentieth-century ideas on a text innocent of them, seems to assume it was only recently that philosophers came to think that understanding nature requires knowing its laws. That's false, and we need to see why.

2. Descartes's Scientific Project

People knowledgeable about the history of science in the early modern period generally acknowledge that by the seventeenth century scientists and philosophers were beginning to see that "one of the main aims—perhaps *the* main aim—of a natural philosopher should be the discovery of the laws governing the natural world."[7] I quote J. R. Milton here, who cites Bacon, Descartes, and Newton as examples. Steven Weinberg has made a similar claim, adding the names of Galileo and Kepler to that of Descartes.[8] So has David Wootton.[9] I'll focus on Descartes.

That Descartes was an important influence on Spinoza seems to me quite clear.[10] In the preface to the *Nagelate Schriften*, the early Dutch translation of the *Opera posthuma*, Jarig Jelles writes that Spinoza:

> …was trained in letters from an early age and in his adolescence was occupied for many years mainly with theology. But when he had reached the age where the understanding is mature and capable of investigating the nature of things, he dedicated himself entirely to philosophy. Receiving full satisfaction neither from his teachers nor from the writers in these sciences, and driven by a burning desire to know, he decided to see what he himself could do in these matters. To that end the philosophical writings of that celebrated man, René Descartes, were of great use.[11]

[7] Milton, "Laws of Nature." [8] Weinberg, *Dreams*, 10–11.

[9] See particularly ch. 9 of Wootton, *The Invention of Science*.

[10] For a reading of Spinoza which emphasizes the influence of Hobbes, see Garber, "Natural Philosophy." I agree with Garber that Spinoza's natural philosophy is closer to that of Hobbes than it is to that of Descartes. But I think the evidence of this section indicates that he arrived at that philosophy by critical reflection on Descartes.

[11] The edition of the prefaces by Akkerman, in his "Studies," 205–75, is most easily accessible in Akkerman and Hubbeling, "Preface," 103–73. Akkerman gives both Jelles's Dutch preface to the *Nagelate schriften* and Lodewijk Meijer's Latin translation of it for the *Opera posthuma*. I translate the Dutch. At present there is no English translation in print of either preface, but Steven Nadler and I expect to include Russ Leo's translation in a third volume of *Collected Works* (C III). There are two recent French translations: Jelles and Meyer, *Par ses amis*, trans. Maxime Rovere, and Jelles, *Préface*, translated by Bernard Pautrat. Pautrat's translation is included in the new *Pléiade* edition of Spinoza's works.

Similar testimony to Descartes's importance for Spinoza occurs in the preface Meijer contributed to Spinoza's exposition of Descartes (*DPP*), which hailed Descartes as:

> …the brightest star of our age, [who] by his new method brought out of darkness and into the light whatever mathematical [truths] had been inaccessible to the ancients and…uncovered firm foundations for philosophy, on which a great many truths can be built. [*DPP*, pref (G I 128/C I 226)][12]

Spinoza would not have let Meijer's rhetoric pass as an introduction to his work if he had fundamentally disagreed with it. But he did have reservations about some aspects of this claim, which he asked Meijer to articulate on his behalf. We'll consider these below. First we must see what Spinoza admired in Descartes's work.

When Spinoza undertook to instruct a student in philosophy, and did not want to teach him his own philosophy, he decided to axiomatize a portion of one of Descartes's works.[13] His choice of a work to axiomatize is significant. He did not choose the *Meditationes*, the text philosophers nowadays focus on; he chose the *Principia philosophiae*. What's more, the part of the *Principia* he initially axiomatized was Part II (and a few pages from Part III), not Part I. That is, he chose to teach his student Cartesian physics (and a bit of Cartesian cosmology), not Cartesian metaphysics and epistemology. He ignored what Descartes himself thought were the foundations of his philosophy. It was friends who persuaded him that to publish his work he needed to add an axiomatization of part I [cf. Ep 13, Spinoza to Oldenburg, July 17/27, 1663 (G IV 63–9/C I 207–12)].

Spinoza's decision about what to teach his student implies a judgment about what was important in Descartes. Clearly he was interested in Cartesian science, and liked Descartes's use of the mathematical method; clearly also, he didn't agree with Meijer's claim that Descartes had chosen firm foundations to build on. We see this in the criticism Meijer made on his behalf in the Preface. There are many things in Descartes's *Principia*, Meijer says, which Spinoza rejects as false [*DPP* pref (G I 131, 30–3/C I 229)]. As examples he mentions various propositions regarding the human mind: that it is a substance, that its will is distinct from the

[12] In quotations from Spinoza I cite my edition (C), Gebhardt's edition (G) of the original language texts, and when it is available, the new PUF edition (O), under the general editorship of Pierre-François Moreau. I believe we should prefer the PUF edition to Gebhardt's whenever they both contain the same texts; but so far, unfortunately, it does not include an edition of *Renati des Cartes Principia philosophiae* (*DPP*), the *Cogitata metaphysica* (*CM*), or the correspondence. When it is available I depend on the original language text in O, though for the convenience of the reader, I continue to cite G as well. I believe we should treat the Gebhardt pagination in the same way commentators on Plato treat the Stephanus page numbers and students of Aristotle treat the Bekker numbers. I don't imagine many scholars use those editions nowadays, but it is a great convenience to have a common system of reference to the texts.

[13] Cf. Ep 13, Spinoza to Oldenburg, July 17/27, 1663 (G IV 63/C I 207) with Meijer's Preface to the *DPP* (G I 129–30/C I 227).

intellect, and that the will has the liberty Descartes ascribes to it. But what's most important for our purposes is that he disagrees with Descartes about the limits of the human understanding:

> What is found in some places—e.g. *that this or that surpasses the human understanding*—must be taken … as said only on behalf of Descartes. For it must not be thought that our author offers this as his own opinion. He judges that all those things, and even many others more sublime and subtle, can not only be conceived clearly and distinctly, but also explained very satisfactorily—*provided only that the human intellect is guided in the search for truth and knowledge along a different path from the one Descartes opened up* …. If we wish our intellect to rise to the pinnacle of knowledge, different foundations are required. [*DPP* pref (G I 132/C I 230), my emphasis]

So for all of his admiration for Descartes, Spinoza thinks the very foundations of his philosophy were flawed. What does he think is wrong with them? What different path would he recommend? To answer these questions we'll need to consider Descartes's dreams for science more closely.

2.1 Explaining All the Phenomena by Laws

In a letter to Mersenne in 1629 Descartes announced an ambitious program: he had resolved "to explain, not one phenomenon only, but *all* the phenomena of nature," which he identifies with "*the whole* of physics."[14] His earliest attempt to implement this project, the unfinished *Le monde*, posited three kinds of elementary body, which differed only in their mathematical properties (size, shape, and motion) and three fundamental laws of nature, which would explain how these elements could generate, from an initial chaos, the world we know through our senses.[15] These included versions of the principles of inertia and the conservation of motion. Here's a sample of the inertial principle, which Descartes formulates as two separate laws:

> [I] Each part of matter always continues in the same state unless collision with [other bodies] forces it to change its state …. e.g. if it is brought to rest in some place, it will never depart from it unless others drive it out; and if it has once begun to move, it will always continue with an equal force until others stop or

[14] Descartes to Mersenne, November 13, 1629 (AT I 70/CSMK III 7), my emphases. Though I give references to the translations in CSMK for the convenience of readers, unless otherwise noted, translations from Descartes are mine.

[15] Cf. *Le monde*, ch. 5–7 (AT XI 23–48/CSMK I 88–98). Stephen Gaukroger's translation in Descartes, *World*, is extremely helpful, as is Daniel Garber's commentary in *Metaphysical Physics*, ch. 7. I've discussed Descartes's laws of nature in an entry in Nolan, *Descartes Lexicon*, 440–6.

> retard it ….[III] When a body is moving, even if its motion most often takes place along a curved line, and it can never make any movement which is not in some way circular, nevertheless, each of its parts individually tends always to continue moving along a straight line. And so the action of these parts, i.e. the inclination they have to move, is different from their motion. (AT XI, 38, 43–4; Gaukroger, 25, 29)

So Descartes's laws tell us how bodies *tend* to act, how they *would* act, absent interference from other bodies. Earlier Descartes had formulated them as governing motion in a vacuum, but by the time he wrote *Le monde*, he had rejected the idea of a vacuum. There he held that there will always be interference from other bodies. So his laws are idealizations, which tell us how bodies would act in conditions which never actually obtain. Nevertheless, insofar as they tell us what tendencies bodies actually have, they report something which has an effect in the actual world.

Descartes claimed that even if God had created not the orderly world he in fact created but a chaotic world, a great mass of matter, divided into parts of many different sizes and shapes, tending to move in many different directions and at many different speeds, the laws God established were sufficient to:

> …cause (*faire*) the parts of this chaos to disentangle themselves and dispose themselves in such a good order that they will have the form of a very perfect world, in which one will be able to see not only light but also all the other things, both general and particular, which appear in the real world.[16]

Note that Gaukroger's Descartes speaks of the laws as *causes* of the order which is supposed to emerge from this chaos. Some commentators have resisted using this language,[17] perhaps because the dominant view among post-Humean philosophers has been that causes are events. To speak of something which is not an event as a cause feels strange. But Descartes was writing at a time when the dominant philosophy did not think of causation in Humean terms, but allowed a wide variety of factors to be considered as causes, anything which might be part of a comprehensive explanation for a thing's having the properties it does. So it's not surprising that in the *Principia* Descartes would use causal language about his laws, calling God "the general cause of all the motions in the world" and the laws of nature the "secondary and particular causes" of the motions we observe [*Pr. phil.* II 36–7 (AT VIIIA 61–3/CSMK I 240–1)]. Why does he treat laws as causes?

[16] The translation here is Gaukroger's from Descartes, *World*, but Stoothoff also uses "cause" to translate *faire* in CSMK I 91.

[17] See, for example, Hattab, "Concurrence or Divergence?"; Schmaltz, *Causation*, 115n; Garber, *Metaphysical Physics*, 198, 201, and 358n.

One reason, no doubt, is that he thought of laws as a critical part of the explanation of any physical phenomenon. But I believe he also thought this solved a problem for theists committed to God's supreme perfection and causation of the world. If God is perfect, he must be immutable; but if he is immutable, how can he be the cause of a constantly changing world? We see Descartes's concern with this question in the opening lines of chapter 7 of *Le monde*:

> I don't want to delay any longer telling you the means by which Nature alone is able to untangle the confusion of the chaos of which I've spoken, and what laws God has imposed on it .... By 'Nature' here I do not mean some deity or other sort of imaginary power. Rather, I use the word to signify matter itself, insofar as I am considering it taken together with the totality of qualities I have attributed to it, and on the condition that God continues to preserve it in the same way that he created it. For it necessarily follows from the mere fact that he continues to preserve it thus that there are many changes in the parts that cannot, it seems to me, properly be attributed to the action of God, because this action never changes, and which I therefore attribute to Nature. The rules by which these changes take place I call the Laws of Nature. [AT XI 36–7/CSMK I 92–3]

God's actions themselves don't change; and the laws he causes do not change; but those laws do nevertheless cause the changes that occur. What enables this paradox is the fact that the laws are conditional in form, telling us, for example, that "Each part of matter always continues in the same state unless collision with [other bodies] forces it to change its state." So they produce, in conjunction with what later philosophers would call their initial conditions, the changes we observe.

2.2 The Eternal Truths as Divine Edicts

What does Descartes think the truth of these laws implies about the nature of the world in which they're true? In the correspondence with Mersenne he maintains that God has laid down the eternal truths of mathematics—which he refers to as "laws *in* nature"—just as a king lays down the laws of his kingdom [Descartes to Mersenne, April 15, 1630 (AT I 145/CSMK III 23)]. One reason he's attracted to that comparison is that on his view the truths of geometry don't depend for their truth on the existence, *in rerum natura*, of anything strictly satisfying Euclid's definitions. As he puts it in *Meditatio* V:

> I find in myself countless ideas of things which, even if they perhaps don't exist anywhere outside me, nevertheless can't be said to be nothing. Though I can in some way think of them at will, I do not feign them. They have their own true and immutable natures. [*Med.* V (AT VII 64/CSMK II 44)]

Euclidean triangles are composed of lines which have only one dimension, length. No physical triangle is composed of lines which satisfy that definition. If you think truth is a matter of correspondence with reality, as Descartes generally seems to,[18] you may think this creates a problem about accounting for the truth of mathematical truths. To conceive them as divine edicts arguably solves that problem. Then they will depend for their truth, not on the existence in nature of anything in their subject class, but only on their having been promulgated by the appropriate authority. "Anyone poaching on the king's lands will be severely punished" does not presuppose the existence of the people whose existence the law is intended to prevent.[19]

Discussions of Descartes's doctrine of the creation of the eternal truths tend to focus on mathematical truths. But as we've seen, his physics must deal with similar problems. His laws of motion tell us how bodies *tend* to act, i.e. how they *would* act, but for their interaction with other bodies. Just as there are no triangles which strictly satisfy Euclid's definitions, so his denial of a vacuum means that there are no bodies whose motion is not constrained by surrounding bodies. If there is a problem about the mathematical truths, there will be a problem about the physical laws. And if conceiving mathematical truths as divine edicts solves that problem in our understanding of mathematics, then conceiving physical laws as divine edicts should solve the analogous problem in physics.

It may, however, generate other problems. Although Descartes is silent about his creation doctrine in most of his published works, he did not abandon it. When the authors of the Sixth Objections challenged him to explain how the truths of geometry and metaphysics could be immutable and eternal and yet not be independent of God (AT VII 417/C II 281), his reply not only reaffirms the creation doctrine, but generalizes it, and makes these divine edicts quite arbitrary:

> It's manifest to anyone who attends to God's immensity that there can be absolutely nothing which does not depend on him: not only nothing subsisting, but all order, *every law*, and every reason for anything's being true or good. For otherwise…God would not have been completely indifferent to creating the things he created. If any reason for something's being good had been prior to his preordination, that would have determined him to making what is best. But on the contrary, because he determined himself to making those things which now are, for this very reason, as Genesis says, "they are exceedingly good." [Descartes, *Sextae resp.* (AT VII 435–6/CSMK II 293–4), my emphasis]

To say that Descartes conceived God's creation of the eternal truths as arbitrary is not merely to say that he conceived that creation as an act of will; he also thought

[18] Cf. Descartes to Mersenne, October 16, 1639 (AT II 597/CSMK III 139).
[19] I assume here an interpretation of Descartes argued for in Curley, "Eternal Truths."

that God *could have no reason* for making one choice rather than another. In a human king acting without a reason for action might be thought a defect. But for Descartes God's omnipotence requires that his choices not be determined by any reason.

2.3 The Cosmology of *Le monde* and the *Discours*

The cosmology of *Le monde* maintained that the earth moves around the sun. When Descartes learned of Galileo's condemnation in 1633, he realized that he could not safely publish a work with such a clearly Copernican commitment.[20] So he set *Le monde* aside. But he did not abandon all hope of publishing his findings. In the *Discours de la méthode* he offered a summary of his discoveries, hoping to generate enough interest in his work that the Church would feel pressure to allow its publication. This summary put the laws of nature at the center of his system:

> I've noticed certain laws which God has so established in nature, and of which he's implanted such notions in our minds, that once we've reflected sufficiently on them, we won't be able to doubt that they're exactly observed in everything which exists or happens in the world. [*Disc. méth.* V (AT VI 41/CSMK I 131)]

So the laws are indubitable for anyone who has reflected sufficiently on them. That's not to say that they are self-evident in the Lockean sense that they generate "universal and ready assent upon hearing and understanding the terms." Descartes knew perfectly well that Aristotelian physics made assumptions which conflicted with his laws. But Alquié's edition has a helpful note at this point, emphasizing that Descartes also conceives them as logically or mathematically necessary. "They are innate 'eternal truths,' inscribed in our souls and governing also the world of bodies."[21] More about this below. Meanwhile, we get a teasing advertisement for *Le monde*:

> By considering what follows from these laws it seems to me that I've discovered a number of truths more useful and important than anything I had learned previously, or even hoped to learn. I tried to explain the most important of these truths in a treatise which certain considerations prevent me from publishing. I know of no better way of making them known than by summarizing its contents. [*Disc. méth.* V (AT VI 41/CSMK I 131)]

[20] See Descartes to Mersenne, end of November 1633 (AT I 270–2/CSMK III 40–1).
[21] Descartes, *Oeuvres Alquié*, I, 614, n. 1.

That's as specific as Descartes gets, in part V, about the considerations which prevented him from publishing his treatise. But part VI makes the connection with the Galileo affair clear.

> Three years ago I reached the end of the treatise which contains all these things. I was beginning to revise it, to put it in the hands of a publisher, when I learned that persons to whom I defer, who have hardly less authority over my actions than my own reason has over my thoughts, had disapproved of a physical theory published a little while before by someone else. I will not say that I accepted this theory, but only that before their condemnation I had not noticed anything in it which I could imagine to be prejudicial either to religion or to the state. [*Disc. méth.* VI (AT V 60/CSMK I 141–2)]

Here readers with a rudimentary knowledge of Descartes's biography, and of what was going on in contemporary science, should have gotten the hint. If the reader knows that Descartes is a Catholic, and that three years earlier his church had condemned Galileo's *Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems* because its Copernicanism was prejudicial to religion, it should be clear what was preventing Descartes from publishing his scientific work. Without committing himself to the Copernican theory, or even explicitly mentioning it, Descartes hints that he embraces some version of it, and raises the question whether there was any real harm in it.

Though Descartes's summary of *Le monde* in the *Discours* omits much, including the laws his system made fundamental, even *Le monde* itself did not give a full account of his discoveries. As the summary explains:

> Fearing that I could not put everything I had in mind into my discourse, I undertook merely to expound what I understood about light. Then…I added something about the sun and fixed stars, because almost all light comes from them; about the heavens, because they transmit light; about planets, comets, and the earth, because they reflect light; about terrestrial bodies in particular, because they are either colored or transparent or luminous; and finally, about man, because he observes these bodies. [*Disc. méth.* V (AT VI 42/CSMK I 132)]

This is maddeningly vague, but Descartes wants to frame his account in a way which will not lead him into unnecessary controversy:

> To leave all these matters somewhat obscure, and to be able to say more freely what I thought about them, without having either to follow or to refute the opinions accepted by the learned, I resolved to leave all this world to their disputes, and to speak only about what would happen in a new world, if God now created, somewhere in the imaginary spaces, enough matter to compose it, and if he set in motion, variously and in a disorderly way, the different parts of this

> matter, so as to make a chaos as confused as any the poets could invent, and that afterward he did nothing but lend his ordinary concurrence to nature, leaving it to act according to the laws he established. [*Disc. méth.* V (AT VI 42/CSMK I 132)]

So Descartes claims that he was not discussing the heavenly bodies we actually observe, but only bodies in a hypothetical world. We might suppose that he makes his cosmology hypothetical because he wants to avoid conflict with Genesis. Very likely that's one reason. But the reason he explicitly gives, which may also be operating, is that he wants to avoid conflict about the nature of the matter he hypothesizes God's creating. It will not have any of the forms and qualities the learned dispute about in the schools, only those mathematical properties we understand with maximal clarity.

There's nothing merely hypothetical, however, about the laws which would operate in this hypothetical world:

> I showed what the laws of nature were, and *without basing my arguments on any principle other than the infinite perfections of God*, I tried to demonstrate all those laws about which we could have any doubt, and to show that…even *if God created several worlds, there could not be any in which they failed to be observed*. [*Disc. méth.* V (AT VI 43/CSMK 132), my emphases][22]

The laws must hold in any world God might have created. To put it in Leibnizian terminology, they must hold in any possible world. They must be necessary, eternal truths. Why?

Descartes claims that this follows from the argument he uses to justify them. It's a necessary truth that God exists and is supremely perfect, where supreme perfection entails having all perfections. That's definitional for Descartes.[23] And if the laws follow necessarily from necessary truths about the nature of God,[24] they *must* hold in any world he might have created. What follows from necessary truths alone must itself be a necessary truth. So Alquié is right: Descartes is committed to holding that the laws of nature are eternal truths.

[22] Descartes had used similar language in *Le monde*: "The knowledge of these truths is so natural to our souls that we cannot but judge them infallible when we conceive them distinctly, nor doubt that if God had created many worlds, they would be as true in each of them as in this one" [*Le monde* 7 (AT XI 47/CSMK I 97/*World* 31)].

[23] See Descartes's definition of God (def 8) in the geometrical appendix to the *Secundae responsiones* (AT VII 162/CSMK II 114).

[24] I say "from necessary truths" because the passage quoted from the *Discours* talks about deducing the laws from "God's *perfections*." Why the plural? The letter to Mersenne and the Latin version of *Principia* II 36, might suggest that only one perfection is involved in the deduction: immutability. But in the French version of the *Principia*, the *Principes de la philosophie* Descartes added a reference to God's omnipotence, perhaps because he had come to think that God's omnipotence was also required for the deduction because it entailed that the laws were the products of God's will. *Principia/Principes* I 42, affirms that God's power is so great that whatever is or can be is something he has willed.

This creates problems. If the laws must hold in any possible world, then they must also hold in the actual world. So when Descartes claimed that he wasn't going to discuss the actual world, only a possible world, that was misleading. The laws he identified as operating in his hypothetical world must also be true of the actual world. Moreover, if the laws of nature are eternal truths, and God has established them as a king has established laws in his kingdom, then the laws of nature must also be divine edicts, which suggests that they result from a contingent act of the divine will. How are we to reconcile the view that the laws of nature are divine edicts with the view Descartes also maintains, that the laws follow simply from God's infinite perfections?

Descartes addressed a version of this problem as early as the letter to Mersenne in which he first announced his creation doctrine:

> People will say to you: if God had established these truths, he could change them, as a king does his laws. To this one must reply: yes, if his will can change. —But I understand them to be eternal and immutable. —I judge the same of God. —But his will is free. —Yes, but his power is incomprehensible. [Descartes to Mersenne, 15 April 1630 (AT I 145–6/CSMK III 29)]

Descartes takes it for granted, in this dialogue, that the eternal truths are necessary and that his problem is to explain how, consistently with their necessity, they can also be the products of God's will. Jean-Marie Beyssade once put this in a way I found illuminating:

> The incomprehensibility of the divine power, far from extending contingency to the domain of mathematical truths, where we perceive only necessity, is invoked, on the contrary, to safeguard necessity, where we can only imagine contingency.[25]

I largely agree with this, but with some reservations. Descartes clearly wants to explain how the truths of mathematics can be eternal, even though God has willed them. What safeguards their necessity, I would say, is the immutability of the divine will. The incomprehensibility of God's power functions to reconcile us to the idea that it can be a contingent matter that certain truths are necessary. God could have willed different truths to be necessary, though he cannot *now* will different necessary truths.[26] But this possibility is one we cannot grasp.

[25] Beyssade, *La philosophie*, 112 (my translation).

[26] In "Eternal Truths" I argued that Descartes's doctrine commits him not (*pace* Frankfurt, "Eternal Truths") to the doctrine that there are no necessary truths but to a thesis involving iterated modalities: though there are necessary truths, it's not necessary that they be necessary. I find the clearest passage in favor of this reading in the *Conversation with Burman* (AT V 160/CSMK III 343), where Burman asks whether God could have commanded his creatures to hate him, and thereby made that

2.4 The Idea of a Unified Science

Cartesian science embarks on the ambitious project of trying to explain all the phenomena of nature, understanding explanation to involve subsumption under laws which are necessary truths. But there is more than that in the Cartesian background which we need to help us understand Spinoza's system. When I first began studying Spinoza, I found Stuart Hampshire attributing the idea of a unified science to Spinoza:

> If we are to provide a complete explanation of the existence and activity of anything in the Universe, we must be able to deduce the existence and activity of the thing studied from the essential attributes and modes of the self-creating God or Nature. This so-called pantheistic doctrine can in fact be fairly represented as the metaphysical expression of the ideal or programme of a unified science, that is, of a completed science which would enable every natural change to be shown as a completely determined effect within a single system of causes; everything must be explicable within a single theory.[27]

Now I think Hampshire was essentially right about this, though I don't think he fully exploited the implications of his insight. Still, what he says here is tremendously helpful in understanding Spinoza, and my first book on Spinoza is essentially an elaboration on this theme. Call him precursor #1.[28]

The best-known expression of the idea of a unified science in Descartes occurs in the tree metaphor he uses in the preface to the French edition of the *Principes*, where he writes:

> The whole of philosophy is like a tree, whose roots are metaphysics and whose trunk is physics. The branches emerging from the trunk are all the other sciences .... [*Principes*, pref (AT IXB 14/CSMK I 186)]

This idea is not unique to the *Principes*; it goes back to some of the earliest writings we have from Descartes.[29] So far we've seen only the beginnings of Descartes's

good. Descartes replies that he cannot *now* do this, but that we don't know what he could have done. "Why couldn't he have given his creature this command?" Descartes asks. Beyssade's edition of the *Conversation* cites a number of passages from the correspondence to a similar effect. See Descartes and Burman, *L'entretien*, 71, n. 8.

[27] Hampshire, *Spinoza*, 47.

[28] I haven't always made my debt to Hampshire as clear as I should have. In *Spinoza's Metaphysics* I mentioned this passage in the Preface and alluded to it in a note on p. 167, intending to acknowledge that debt. In retrospect I think I should have been more explicit and emphatic. I've tried to do better in subsequent work. Cf. *Geometrical Method*, 140, n. 3, and "Metaphysics Revisited," 25.

[29] e.g. "The sciences now are masked…" [*Cogitationes privatae* (AT X 215/CSMK I, 3)]; "All the sciences are so closely interconnected…" [*Regulae* 1 (AT X 361/CSMK I 10)].

implementation of that idea: his announcement to Mersenne of his ambition to explain all the phenomena of nature; his earliest attempt to fulfill that ambition, specifying the basic kinds of physical object and the fundamental laws he claims lead from those objects to the world of our experience; his affirmation that God has established these laws in nature. We haven't seen how he thinks we can deduce the existence and activity of particular things from these laws. If Cartesian science is going to provide an explanation of *all* the phenomena of nature, it must get from these general laws to particular phenomena, like the *parhelia* observed in Rome in 1629 [Descartes to Mersenne, October 8, 1629 (AT I 23/CSMK III 6)].

Descartes's essay in optics shows us how he would make that connection. In *La dioptrique* he first postulates that in bodies we call luminous, light is nothing but "a certain movement, or very rapid and lively action, which passes to our eyes through the medium of the air and other transparent bodies" [*La dioptrique* 1 (AT VI 84/CSMK I 153)]. Later he adds that "the action, or tendency to move (which…should be taken for light), must in this respect follow the same laws as movement itself" [*La dioptrique* 1 (AT VI 89/CSMK I 155)]. From these assumptions he derives the less general laws of reflection and refraction.[30] By the end of *La dioptrique* Descartes is using these principles to explore the nature of vision and ways of improving it through instruments like the telescope. In *Les Météores*, he uses them to explain the rainbow. These portions of Descartes's works are often abridged in modern translations because the science, though an advance on previous discussions, is now rather dated. But Descartes's attempt to solve these problems shows what his ambitions were; and the magnitude of those ambitions helps to explain why Spinoza found his project exciting.

One final point about Descartes. To get to a deduction of particular phenomena from the laws of nature, we need more than the laws themselves. Though Descartes thinks that an explanation of particular phenomena must deduce them from the laws of nature, he knows that you can't deduce conclusions about particular events from these laws without information about the circumstances in which the laws are operating. This is a well-known principle of logic. The laws are universal statements. You can't deduce a particular conclusion from them without also assuming some particular premises.

Descartes's essay on the rainbow illustrates this nicely. He begins by observing that rainbows appear, not only in the sky, but also in the air around us, whenever there are many drops of water lit by the sun, as in fountains.[31] He hypothesizes that this phenomenon is caused by rays of light striking on drops of water. To explain this more precisely, he conducts an elaborate experiment. He fills a large,

[30] For good accounts, see Gaukroger, *Descartes*, 139–46 or Boyer, *The Rainbow*, ch. 8.

[31] In summarizing Descartes's argument, I simplify considerably. For fuller discussions see the works by Gaukroger and Boyer cited above. See also two chapters in Garber, *Descartes Embodied*: "Descartes and Experiment in the *Discourse* and Essays," 85–110 and "Descartes on Knowledge and Certainty: From the *Discours* to the *Principia*," 111–29.

spherical glass flask with water and observes how its position in relation to the sun's rays and the flask affects the appearance of the rainbow. He finds that when the angle of observation[32] is approximately 42°, he sees a bright red band on the flask. If he increases the angle of observation slightly, the color disappears. If he decreases it somewhat, the color is different (yellow, or blue, etc.). If he increases the angle to 52°, he again observes a red band, but fainter in color, as are the other colors he sees as he gradually decreases that angle. He concludes that the brighter colors were caused by the rays of light first being refracted as they pass from the air into the water of the flask, then being reflected by the back of the flask, and finally being refracted again as they leave the flask. The fainter colors were caused by the rays being refracted twice and reflected twice. He confirms this by placing an opaque object in the various paths he supposes the rays must take and observing that the colors disappear when he interferes with those paths in certain ways.

This much of Descartes's theory is essentially correct. He was less successful in accounting for the differences in color. But the question how far Descartes got the rainbow right is not important for our purposes. What is important is what this example shows us about his conception of scientific explanation and the role the experience of particular phenomena plays in that process. In the *Discours* he writes that:

> …regarding experiments, I noticed that they become all the more necessary the further we advance in knowledge …. The order I have adopted in this is as follows: first, I tried to discover in general the principles or first causes of everything which exists or can exist in the world, without considering anything as their cause except God alone, who created it, drawing [the principles] from certain seeds of truth which are naturally in our souls. After that I examined what were the first and most ordinary effects one could deduce from these causes. In that way it seemed to me that I discovered heavens, stars, an Earth, and on the earth, water, air, fire, minerals, and certain other things, which are the most common and simple of all, and therefore the easiest to know. [*Disc. méth.* VI (AT VI 63–4/CSMK I 143–4), my emphasis]

So far we have what appears to be a completely a priori deduction. If we think of these first effects as particular existing things, it might strike us as inconsistent with the usual Christian way of understanding the creation to say that they follow from the nature of God. But Descartes seems to be thinking of them not as particular existing things, but as types of things which *can* exist. *An* Earth, not *the* Earth, etc. Understanding particular existents requires a priori deduction to be supplemented by experience of particular finite things:

[32] That is, the angle made by a line drawn from his eye to the flask, as it intersects with a line drawn from the sun to the flask.

> When I wanted to descend to those which were more particular, so many different ones presented themselves to me, that I did not believe it possible for the human mind to distinguish the forms or species of bodies on the earth from an infinity of others which could have been there if it had been God's will to put them there, nor consequently, to relate them to our use, except by arriving at the causes through their effects and using several particular experiments. Afterward, reflecting on all the objects ever presented to my senses, I dare say that I have never noticed anything I could not conveniently explain by the principles I had discovered. But I must also confess that the power of nature is so ample and so vast, and that these principles are so simple and so general, that I notice hardly any particular effect without being aware that it can be deduced from them in a number of different ways and that my greatest difficulty is ordinarily to discover in which of these ways it depends on them. For that purpose I know of no better expedient than to look again at a number of experiments such that their outcome is not the same if it must be explained in one way rather than the other. [*Disc. méth.* VI (AT VI 64–5/CSMK I 144)]

Deduction from first principles tells us what kinds of thing *can* happen, consistently with the laws of nature. Experiments tell us which laws are operating in the particular case and how.

3. Spinoza vs. Descartes

Descartes thought that in its ideal form science would consist of a system of laws which were necessary truths, knowable, in principle, a priori. The most general and fundamental laws would be principles implanted in our souls by God. The less general laws would be deducible from the fundamental principles, yielding a system of laws which would explain all the particular phenomena of the physical world, when supplemented appropriately by information about the circumstances of the phenomena. Spinoza, I claim, thought Descartes was right to conceive physics as a comprehensive deductive system of necessary truths, proceeding from very general, fundamental laws to less general laws, and right to recognize that, if we're to explain a particular phenomenon, we must supplement the laws with statements about the particular circumstances. He rejected the idea that the fundamental laws of this system were the decrees of a king-like God, who implanted knowledge of them in our souls:

> No one will be able to perceive correctly the things I maintain if he does not take great care not to confuse God's power with the human power or right of kings. [E2p3s]

Not only did the Cartesian view imply an anthropomorphic conception of God, it also posited as the ultimate explanation of that system an act of will which could just as easily have been different, an act we cannot explain, because it has, in principle, no explanation. This mystery at the heart of Descartes's system was unacceptable to Spinoza. We've seen that in Meijer's Preface to *DPP*. The things Descartes claims we can't explain can all be explained very satisfactorily, provided we seek the truth by a different path. What is that different path?

3.1 The Laws of Nature in the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*

The idea that everything happens according to the laws of nature occurs early in Spinoza's earliest surviving work, the *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*:[33]

> Good and bad are said only relatively; so one and the same thing can be called either good or bad depending on different considerations, in the same way as it's called perfect or imperfect. For nothing, considered in its own nature, will be called perfect or imperfect, especially after we have recognized that all things happen according to an eternal order, and according to certain laws of nature. [*TIE* §12 (O I 70/G II 8/C I 10)][34]

This gives us an important part of the theory of laws articulated at the beginning of this chapter: the proposition that everything which happens does so in accordance with the laws of nature. It also equates happening according to the laws of nature with happening according to 'an eternal order.' I take that to mean that, whereas Descartes thinks of a law of nature as a certain kind of truth, made true by the dictate of the creator, not by the existence of anything in nature, Spinoza thinks that if a law of nature is true, it is true because there is an eternal order of things in nature, an order which is a distinct part of the furniture of the universe. And the term "law" (or *lex* in Latin) is ambiguous between these two meanings: a general truth about nature and the facts which make that truth true. In *Spinoza's Metaphysics* I tried to capture this conception when I spoke about 'nomological facts' and borrowed the Popperian phrase "structural properties of the world" to refer to those features of reality which make law-statements true. Here I'll borrow from David Armstrong the term 'truthmaker' to refer to those features.[35]

[33] On the date of this work, see Mignini's discussion in O I 28–44. In making references, I'll use the Bruder section numbers, given in my translation in C I and in O I.

[34] As noted above, though I am using the text in O I, I will give references in G for the convenience of the reader.

[35] Cf. Armstrong, *Law of Nature*. As Armstrong initially uses this term, it does not commit him to a particular theory of the nature of the truthmakers for laws. I'll have more to say about the truthmakers for laws in Spinoza when we get to the *TTP*.

Critics have sometimes ignored this aspect of my interpretation. Melamed initially complained that my identification of God with the fundamental laws of nature was "quite astonishing, because it seems to make God into a principle or *lex*, rather than an *ens* or *res*."[36] But in my *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 54–6, I had called attention to the ambiguity lurking in the term "law of nature," between laws considered as propositions and laws considered as the general facts which make the propositions true, indicating that I identified God's power or essence with the general facts which the most fundamental laws describe. Later in his book Melamed seems to be aware of this, but dismisses the distinction as "a slight variation."[37] What was astonishing in the early pages is a matter of no great importance later.

When Spinoza says that all things happen according to an eternal order, he does not limit that claim to things in the attribute of extension. In §85, he contrasts his own view with that of the ancients, who "never, so far as I know, conceived the soul as we do here, as acting according to certain laws, like a spiritual automaton" [*TIE* §85 (O I 118/G II 32/C I 37)]. The idea that minds, like bodies, act according to the laws of nature is not part of his Cartesian inheritance; it represents a significant break from Descartes.

Though Spinoza will not ground the laws of nature in God's *will*, he does not reject the idea that God is their ultimate ground. In §99 he writes:

> As for order, if all our perceptions are to be ordered and united, it's required, and reason demands, that as soon as possible we ask whether there is a certain being, and what sort of being it is, which is the cause of all things, so that its objective essence may also be the cause of all our ideas. Then our mind will (as we have said) represent [*referet*] nature as much as possible. For it will have nature's essence, order, and unity objectively. [*TIE* §99 (O I 126/G II 36/C I 41)][38]

Clearly the 'being…which is the cause of all things' is God. This is one aspect of the traditional conception of God Spinoza retains. But his requirement that we ask what sort of being that cause is, suggests what later works will confirm, that he doesn't think that cause will necessarily turn out to have the other attributes traditionally ascribed to God. Among the attributes he rejects: that God is a lawmaker (*TTP* 4), that intellect, will and love are essential to God's nature (E1p31), and that God acts for the sake of an end (E1app).

[36] Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 10. [37] Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 113.

[38] Here I've modified my translation in C I, mostly in stylistic ways. One change is consequential: I use "represent," rather than "reproduce," to translate *referet* in the second sentence (and elsewhere in quotations from this *Treatise*). To say that our mind has nature's order 'objectively' is to say that it contains a representation of that order. Cf. *DPP* I D3 (G I 150/C I 239).

In the *Ethics* Spinoza will define God as "an absolutely infinite being, that is, a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses an eternal and infinite essence" [E1d6]. Did he think we could make *that* idea the cause of all our other ideas? I think not. I believe he would have regarded D6 itself, which mentions no specific attribute, as too abstract for that purpose. When he refers us to what he's said before, he's evidently alluding to §42:

> For our mind to represent [*referat*] completely the pattern [*exemplar*] of nature it must produce all of its ideas from the idea which represents [*refert*] the origin and source of the whole of nature, so that that idea will be the source of all its other ideas. [*TIE* §42 (O I 88/G II 17/C I 20][39]

The idea of a being which is the cause of all things, whose representation in thought is supposed to be the cause of all our ideas, is an idea which represents "the origin and source of the whole of nature." Later Spinoza will equate the idea of the origin and source of nature with an idea of "the first elements of the whole of nature." Criticizing the Stoics' physicalist conception of the mind, he comments that it arises partly because they:

> …do not understand the first elements of the whole of nature. Proceeding without order and confusing nature with abstractions…they confuse themselves and overturn the order of nature. We won't need to fear any such deception, if we proceed, as far as we can, in a manner which is not abstract at all, and begin as soon as possible from the first elements, i.e. from the source and origin of nature. [*TIE* §75 (O I 110/G II 28–9/C I 33)]

What is "the source and origin of nature"? What are these "first elements of the whole of nature"? Certainly not the whole of nature itself. Gueroult suggested that we should take them to be what in later works Spinoza would call the attributes; Michelle Beyssade concurs.[40]

I think they're right, but the phrase "in later works" calls for some explanation. In the *TIE* Spinoza does not use the terminology of the *Ethics* to articulate his ontology. *Substantia* does not occur there at all. *Attributum* occurs once, but in a footnote which is arguably a later addition. *Modus* occurs frequently, but in the

[39] The Latin of the first clause reads: *ut mens nostra omnino referat Naturae exemplar*. In C I translated this "for the mind to reproduce completely the likeness of nature." I now think, not only that "represent" is a better choice than "reproduce" for *referat* here, but that "pattern" is better than "likeness" for *exemplar*. In Spinoza *exemplar* frequently refers to a copy of a printed book or a MS or to the original text of a MS. (Cf. the Glossary-Indices at C I 676, and C II 679.) The most important uses occur in the Preface to E4 and in *TTP* 13.23, and 14.30, where it signifies a model to be imitated. Spinoza's thought is that the order of causes in the world should be the model for the mind's ideas.

[40] Cf. Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, 169, n. 88, and M. Beyssade in O I 154, n. 157. Since the substance-attribute-mode terminology is prominent in the *KV*, I think the terminological peculiarities of the *TIE* provide a good reason to accept Mignini's view that that work is earlier than the *KV*.

non-technical sense best translated by "way," not "mode."[41] Gueroult's suggestion is a plausible hypothesis about how the later Spinoza would have expressed the views he held in the *TIE*.

Suppose we accept that hypothesis and consider the attribute we know best, extension. How are we to deduce all our ideas from the idea of extension? Or to be more precise, how are we to deduce all our ideas *of modes of extension* from our idea of the attribute of extension? Well, extension, as a divine attribute, must express an eternal and infinite essence (E1d6). That means, I think, that it has a nature which can be expressed in propositions necessarily true of all extended things. E2p49 entails that every idea, insofar as it is an idea, involves an affirmation or negation.[42] So to deduce our ideas of extended things from the attribute of extension would be to deduce necessary truths about extended things from those necessary truths expressing the nature of extension. Let us return now to §99. Spinoza prescribes that we must:

> …always deduce all our ideas from physical things, *or* [*sive*] from real beings, proceeding, as far as possible, according to the series of causes, from one real being to another, in such a way that we do not pass over to abstractions and universals …. [*TIE* §99 (O I 126/G II 36/C I 41)][43]

So from our idea of the first cause—i.e. from our idea of the attribute of extension—we deduce other ideas of real beings which constitute a series of causes. The members of *this* series of causes, we learn, are "fixed and eternal," not "singular and changeable."

> [§100] By the series of causes and real beings I do not here understand the series of singular, changeable things, but only the series of fixed and eternal things. [*TIE* §100 (O I 126/G II 36/C I 41]

So they are not the beings Spinoza will later call finite modes (E1p25c, E1p28). But if they are not the finite modes, what are they? The great nineteenth-century commentator Frederick Pollock puzzled over this long ago, and suggested two

[41] In C I, I normally used "way" for *modus* in the *TIE*, except in the phrase *modus percipiendi*, where I used "mode" (e.g. in §§18, 25, 26, 29). In retrospect I think it was a mistake to make that exception. Since the normal contrast terms, *substantia* and *attributum*, are absent in this work, I shouldn't have suggested that *modus* was being used in its technical sense.

[42] This is another place where I was indebted to Hampshire. Cf. his *Spinoza*, 86: "The word 'idea' is used so widely in Spinoza as to include what we would normally call an 'assertion' or 'proposition'…." That ideas in Spinoza normally have a propositional structure may be clear enough, but I think it has not generally been realized how important this is for understanding the logical relations between ideas or their relation to reality.

[43] I've discussed the ambiguities of *sive* in C II 610–12, and will say more about *sive* below. Here I think it introduces an alternative way of putting things which Spinoza regards as more precise or less likely to mislead, not an equivalence.

possible answers: the first, which he rejected, was that the fixed and eternal things are the laws of nature; the second, which he accepted, was that they are the infinite modes, the modes Spinoza speaks of in E1p21–3, as following from 'the absolute nature' of an attribute of God, existing necessarily, and being both infinite and eternal.[44]

Now I agree with Pollock that we should count the infinite modes among the fixed and eternal things, I would also count the attributes among them. But this emended second answer will be helpful only if we can explain what the infinite modes are, and why Spinoza should think there are such entities. At this stage there doesn't seem to be much consensus about that.[45] But I suggest that Pollock's first answer can remedy the defects of the second. Pollock writes that the interpretation of the fixed and eternal things:

> …which lies nearest at hand for a modern reader is to identify them with the constant relations among phenomena which we now call the laws of nature.[46]

Apparently it does not take an acquaintance with the work of Carl Hempel for this possibility to seem attractive to an intelligent nineteenth-century reader. But no sooner did Pollock suggest this line of thought than he quickly rejected it:

> This is evidently not admissible. Spinoza, the downright enemy of abstractions and universals, knew the difference between relations and things far too well to confuse them in this way.[47]

This sounds a note often found in later commentators, that Spinoza's nominalism would require him to dismiss the idea that the laws of nature were eternal *things*, i.e. entities which would have to be included in any complete catalog of what there is. When we come to the *Ethics*, we'll consider just what Spinoza's nominalism comes to, and whether it really precludes his recognizing the laws of nature as real beings. In the meantime, Pollock also objects that because Spinoza does, in §101, "speak of the 'eternal things' as having laws of their own in some way attached to or involved in them…clearly the things in question are not themselves laws." The passage Pollock is referring to here, stated more fully and less vaguely, reads:

[44] See Pollock, *Spinoza*, 141.

[45] In his *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 114, Melamed says there's *no* consensus about it. I think *some* consensus does seem to be emerging: the infinite modes must have *something* to do with the laws of nature. That's good, as far as it goes. But I don't yet see any agreement about how that works. See, for example, Jonathan Bennett, *A Study*, §§26–7; Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's 'Ethics'*, 87–98; or Michael Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 70–4.

[46] Pollock, *Spinoza*, 141.

[47] Pollock, *Spinoza*, 141.

> [The inmost essence of things] is to be sought only from the fixed and eternal things, and also from the laws inscribed in these things, as in their true codes, according to which all singular things come to be and are ordered. [*TIE* §101 (O I 126–8/G II 36–7/C I 41)][48]

I take it that the metaphor of inscription Spinoza uses here is inspired by the necessary connection he sees between law-statements and the real beings which make those statements true. But the critical point about this passage is that it identifies the laws (along with the fixed and eternal things) as something from which the inmost essence of a thing can be sought.

My proposal has been that the idea of a unified science is crucial to understanding this passage. As I read him, Spinoza thought the first elements in the series of fixed and eternal things in the attribute of extension would be the attribute of extension itself, i.e. the truthmakers for the laws which explicate the basic nature of extension. The second members, deducible from the first, and explained by them, would be the truthmakers for the laws of motion, which I identify with what scholars generally call "the immediate infinite mode of extension"—not language Spinoza himself uses, but helpful—and which Spinoza will later identify as "motion" or "motion and rest." This reflects the important role these laws have in Cartesian/Spinozistic physics.

The remaining members of the series are the truthmakers for the lower-level laws, like those of reflection and refraction, which Cartesian science takes to be deducible from the laws of motion, which explain the behavior of particular kinds of extended thing, and which, in my view, collectively constitute what scholars have referred to as "the mediate infinite mode of extension." In Ep 64, Spinoza will refer to this infinite mode as the *facies totius universi*, commonly translated "the face of the whole universe" [Ep 64, Spinoza to Schuller, July 29, 1675 (G IV 278/C II 439)]. I myself have used that translation in C II. But now I think we can do better, for reasons I'll explain later.

So, I don't entirely agree with Pollock's treatment of these matters. I think he was wrong to say that the series of fixed and eternal things consists only of the infinite modes. It should include the attributes as well. More crucially, I think he was wrong to reject the connection between the fixed and eternal things and the laws of nature. I also don't think he has anything helpful to say about the mediate infinite mode of extension. But there is enough in Pollock that I find congenial that I claim him as precursor #2. His comments on *TIE* §§99–101 certainly influenced me.

[48] *Haec [intima essentia rerum] vero tantum est petenda a fixis atque aeternis rebus, et simul a legibus in iis rebus, tanquam in suis veris codicibus, inscriptis, secundum quas omnia singularia, et fiunt, et ordinantur*. For *codicibus* ("codes" in my translation), the NS has *wetboeken*, lawbooks. The reference seems to be to an official summary of the laws, as in the Code of Justinian.

How do the singular, mutable things fit into this picture? When Spinoza says in *TIE* §100 that by the series of causes he means the series of fixed and eternal things, he does not thereby deny that particular things also play a role in causing other particular things. After all, when he identifies the series of causes as the series of fixed and eternal things, he explains that he does so because:

> [§100]…it would be impossible for human weakness to grasp the series of singular changeable things, not only because there are innumerably many of them, but also because of the infinite circumstances in one and the same thing, any one of which can be *a cause of its existence or non-existence*. [*TIE* §100 (O I 126/G II 36/C I 41)]

In C I, I translated the italicized phrase, "*the* cause of its existence." But of course Latin has no articles to guide us, so we must use our judgment in deciding whether to use a definite or an indefinite article. I now think my previous judgment was wrong. When we're trying to say what caused a particular singular, mutable thing, we must include both the fixed and eternal things (the laws of nature) and other singular mutable things. In more modern language: the laws of nature and the antecedent conditions are separately necessary and only jointly sufficient conditions for singular things. But if the causes of singular changeable things must include both infinite and finite modes, then no mode, finite or infinite, can really be called *the* cause of another. Each is only one among many causes.

This is confirmed in *TIE* §§102–3, where Spinoza begins by commenting that we have considerable difficulty in arriving at an understanding of singular things. The problem seems to be that neither the series of eternal things nor the series of singular things is sufficient by itself to enable us to understand why they occur when they do. "Other aids will have to be sought, beyond those we use to understand the eternal things and their laws." Spinoza defers offering a solution to this problem. This, he says, is not the place for it:

> [§103] Before we equip ourselves for an understanding of singular things, there'll be time to treat those aids which help us know how to use our senses, and to make, according to certain laws and in order, the experiments sufficient to determine the thing we're seeking, so that at last we may infer from [these experiments] the laws of eternal things by which it was produced and we may begin to know its inmost nature. [*TIE* 103 (O I 128/G II 37/C I 42)]

This recalls Part VI of the *Discours*, where Descartes spoke in general of using experiments to determine how particular effects could be deduced from the laws of nature, but also his account in the *Météores* of the intricate experimentation by which he determined which laws of optics are involved in the explanation of the primary and secondary bows of the rainbow. If *TIE* §§99–103 are to express a

coherent view of explanation we must see both the series of fixed and eternal things, and the series of singular, changeable things, as separately necessary and only jointly sufficient conditions of particular changeable things. When we get to the *TTP*, we'll find additional reason to attribute that concept of explanation to Spinoza.

In concluding this section, I want to acknowledge the possible influence on my interpretation of the first philosophy book I ever read, Will Durant's *Story of Philosophy*. I don't recall going back to Durant when I was first developing my interpretation, but I don't trust my memory in such matters. What is clear to me now is that I find his comments on the fixed and eternal things quite congenial, and think I was quite probably influenced by them:

> Spinoza's very fundamental distinction (the basis of his entire system) [is that] between the 'temporal order'—the 'world' of things and incidents—and the 'eternal order'—the world of laws and structure….

Durant then gives a long quote from §§100–1 of the *Treatise on the Intellect*, followed by the comment that

> [I]f we will keep this passage in mind as we study Spinoza's masterpiece [the *Ethics*], it will itself be clarified, and much in the *Ethics* that is discouragingly complex will unravel itself into simplicity and understanding.[49]

Now Durant was not a Spinoza specialist, but a popularizer, writing a general history of philosophy for a general audience. He makes mistakes about Spinoza that no *aficionado* would now make. And he certainly underestimates the difficulties which will remain in understanding the *Ethics*, even for those who keep in mind the contrast between the fixed and eternal things and the singular, mutable things. But he clearly had a deep affection for Spinoza, and I believe the passage quoted shows a better insight into what is most fundamental in Spinoza than some more recent specialists. I'll call Durant precursor #3.

3.2 Laws in the *Korte Verhandeling*

Here the idea of a division of nature returns, but framed now in the new vocabulary of substance, attribute, and mode.[50] The line is drawn differently, between

[49] Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, 129. Durant's recommendations for further reading suggest that he was likely to have been influenced by Pollock's reading of Spinoza.

[50] Mignini conjectures, plausibly, that Spinoza probably began work on the Latin original of the *Short Treatise* toward the end of 1660, after his move to Rijnsburg, and was contemplating a substantial revision of his work from late in 1661 to early in 1662. See O I 172–3. Cf. Nadler's account of the chronology in *Spinoza, A Life*, 175–91.

the attributes (which *others* call substances) and their modes (subdivided into universal and particular, not eternal and changeable). And we get our first explicit information about what the universal/eternal modes are. Let's take these points in turn.

In *KV* I.7, Spinoza takes up the question whether there can be a legitimate definition of God. His opponents think not: a legitimate definition must be by genus and difference; but God is not a species of any genus; so he cannot be defined legitimately. They offer instead a list various *propria* of God—being the cause of all things, being eternal, immutable, etc.—which are indeed properties peculiar to God, but do not tell us what God is, or what attributes he has. Spinoza rejects the requirement that definition be by genus and difference. He thinks it leads to radical skepticism. And he promises to produce, "according to the true logic, other laws of definition, following the division of Nature we make" [*KV* I.7, §9 (O I 246/G I 46/C I 90)]. That division is into:

> …the attributes (or, as others call them, substances) are things [existing through themselves]—or, to put it better and more accurately, *a* being existing through itself—which therefore makes itself known and shown through itself. [*KV* I.7, §10 (O I 246–8/G I 46–7/C I 90)][51]

And:

> the other things, which we see are only modes of those attributes, which can neither be nor be understood without the attributes. [*KV* I.7, §10 (O I 248/G I 47/C I 90)]

So as the *TIE* divided Nature into fixed and eternal things and singular mutable things, the *KV* divides it into attributes and modes. The attributes are defined in a way which anticipates the definition of substance in the *Ethics*, as beings which exist through themselves and are known through themselves. But Spinoza thinks it better and more accurate to characterize the attributes collectively as constituting *one* being. Why? This is the early form of a question which has bothered readers of the *Ethics*: if God's nature is to consist of infinite attributes (E1d6), how can he be *one* being?

I think Spinoza's best answer to this[52] is that, since the attributes are defined as existing through themselves, that is, as not requiring anything else for their existence, they *must* exist. But if each of the attributes, considered in isolation from the others, *must* exist, it cannot be the case that one exists without the other.

[51] In C I, the phrase here translated "and shown," *en vertoond*, was inadvertently omitted. Cf. O I 246. The phrase added in brackets seems necessary to complete the parallelism. Cf. O I 6–7.

[52] Spinoza had offered a different, and it seems to me less satisfactory, answer to this problem in *KV* I.2 §17. The reasoning in the text is suggested by E1p10s, discussed in Curley, *Geometrical Method*, 28–30.

They are not really distinct from one another, as Descartes and Spinoza understood the notion of a real distinction. So they must always have existed together with the other attributes.

In the next chapter (*KV* I.8) Spinoza will return to the idea of dividing Nature—dividing *the whole of Nature*, he will say—into *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. The former he defines as:

> …a being we conceive clearly and distinctly through itself, and without needing anything other than itself (like all the attributes we have so far described), which is God. [*KV* I.8 (O I 248/G I 47/C I 91)]

So Spinoza here identifies God with *Natura naturans* (nature as productive), i.e. all of the attributes, conceived as *one division of the whole of nature*, not as the whole of nature itself. I emphasize this because we'll find, when we come to part 1 of the *Ethics*, that some commentators, ignoring the *KV*, have argued that the parallel passage there (E1p29s) makes God identical with the whole of nature. We'll examine the grounds for their conclusion later. For now let's just note that it is prima facie inconsistent, not only with the *TIE*, where the first cause, God, was identified with "the first elements of the whole of nature," but also with the *KV*.

In the next paragraph, Spinoza explains that *Natura naturata* (nature as produced), i.e. the totality of modes, has two subdivisions:

> …a universal and a particular. The universal consists in all those modes which depend on God immediately …. The particular consists in all those singular things which are produced by the universal modes. [*KV* I.8 (O I 250/G I 47/C I 91)]

We should not imagine that there is some important change of doctrine here. What in the *TIE* were fixed and eternal things following from the first cause, and in the *Ethics* will be called eternal and infinite modes following from the absolute nature of a divine attribute, are here identified by the logical character of the propositions which make explicit their nature: as laws of nature, they are universal propositions. Similarly, what in the *TIE* were singular, mutable things, and in the *Ethics* will be finite modes, are identified by the logical character of the propositions which describe them: they are particular or singular things. Spinoza is using a different feature of these kinds of thing to distinguish them, not their relation to eternity and change, but the logical category into which their propositional content falls.

When we find Spinoza defining the universal modes as those which depend 'immediately' (*onmiddelijk*) on God, we should take him to mean those modes whose existence follows from the attributes alone, without further information

than is contained in the attributes.[53] The implicit contrast is with particular modes, whose deduction from the attributes will require additional information about other particular modes. The modes which follow 'immediately' from the attributes would be analogous to any theorem which follows from the initial assumptions of a geometrical system (axioms, postulates, definitions) alone, not necessarily a theorem which comes *first* in a particular deductive presentation of the system, a matter about which the mathematician has some choice.

When the *Short Treatise* tells us (in *KV* I.9) that the one universal mode we know in matter is motion, it gives us the only specific information we have prior to Ep 64. Commentators sometimes seek to explain this by suggesting that motion is pervasive throughout the physical world. It's not clear that Spinoza would think this true, much less necessarily true.[54] In any event, the interpretation offered here provides an alternative explanation for the identification of motion as the immediate universal mode of extension. In Spinoza, as in Descartes, the laws of motion play a central role in the unified science both philosophers hope to establish. For Descartes they are the ultimate physical laws, following from the will of an immutable God, and entailing a host of lower-level laws. For Spinoza they are the first laws to be deduced from the laws expressing the essence of extension, but also, as in Descartes, the foundation for all lower-level laws.

In the first paragraph of *KV* I.9, Spinoza has affirmed that motion "has been from all eternity, and will remain to all eternity, immutable, infinite in its kind, and such that it can neither exist nor be understood through itself, but only through extension." But he is evidently not satisfied with simply affirming that motion has these properties. At the beginning of the second paragraph he says that showing that motion has them "belongs more properly to a treatise on natural science than here." This is strong confirmation that the doctrine of infinite modes is motivated by Spinoza's views about the likely structure of a completed science. But though he is convinced that laws of motion will play a central role in the development of that science, he does not think he understands adequately how to set out that science. A note in the MS reports that:

> What is said here of motion in matter is not said seriously [*in ernst*]. For the author still intends to discover its cause, as he has already done, to some extent, *a posteriori*. [*KV* I.9n (O I 251n/G I 48n/C I 91n)][55]

[53] See the Glossary-Index entries for *onmiddelijk* on C I 710, particularly the passages at C I 31, 33, 34, 36, and note *a* on 118. The modes which in the *KV* depend 'immediately' on God are those which in E1p21 are said to follow from the absolute nature of one of his attributes.

[54] The Physical Excursus following E2p13s certainly suggests that he thought some bodies are at rest. Cf. there, axiom 1´ and lemma 3 (O IV 180–2/G II 97–8/C I 458–9).

[55] It's unclear who the author of this note is. Mignini thinks we can't exclude the possibility that Spinoza spoke of himself in the third person. (See O I 454, n. 1.) Perhaps. But the note seems to me more likely to have been written by one of the friends in Amsterdam among whom Spinoza was circulating the MS, reporting to other members of the Amsterdam circle something Spinoza had told him.

When the author of the note says that Spinoza is not speaking about motion *in ernst*, what he means is that he's not speaking on the basis of a demonstration. He has empirical grounds for thinking that motion has the properties he mentions. But his grounds for thinking this are, at this point, empirical, not a priori; so they are not 'serious'. He doesn't know, at this point, how to make the deduction from the nature of extension. But he thinks that should be possible. Later, as we'll see, he will change his mind.

3.2.1 A Word about Truth

Earlier I claimed that Spinoza thought the ideal science he envisaged as possible must reflect the fundamental structure of reality. I take this to be a consequence of his commitment to a correspondence theory of truth. The ideal science would consist of a set of propositions, organized into a deductive system, analogous to Euclid's *Geometry*, in which, from a few very simple axioms, you could, in principle, deduce all the laws of nature needed to explain particular events in nature. "In principle" here means that there are truths there to be discovered. If those axioms, and the laws deduced from them, are true, they must reflect the nature of reality.

Not everyone will agree that Spinoza was a correspondence theorist, for complicated reasons I've discussed elsewhere.[56] Here I'll be brief and dogmatic: Spinoza's most illuminating discussion of truth occurs in the *CM* I.6, where he writes:

> Since ordinary people first invent words, which are afterwards used by philosophers, it seems desirable for someone seeking the original meaning of a term, to ask what it first denoted among ordinary people .... The first meaning of *true* and *false* seems to have arisen from stories; a story was said to be true, when it was about an event which had really happened, and false when it was about an event which had not happened anywhere. Afterwards philosophers used these words to denote the agreement of an idea with its object. So an idea is called true when it shows us the thing as it is in itself, but false when it shows us the thing as other than it really is. For ideas are nothing but narratives, *or* [*sive*] mental histories of nature. [*CM* I.6 (G I 246/C I 312)]

Now in the *CM* Spinoza is often expounding the views of others. So we need to be cautious when we appeal to it. But this passage provides a rationale for a proposition Spinoza will take as an axiom in the *Ethics*: "A true idea must agree with its object" [EIa6]. And its last sentence gives us a gloss on a proposition distinctive of Spinoza's conception of ideas: that every idea involves an affirmation or negation [E2p49]. So I don't think it can be dismissed as not stating Spinoza's own view.

[56] See Curley, "Spinoza on Truth."

If this account of truth is correct, then a scientific theory consisting of true ideas would show us nature as it really is.

3.3.1 Laws of Nature in *Ethics* 1

A reader who approaches Part 1 of the *Ethics* without benefit of the preceding discussion might be excused for agreeing with Schliesser that the laws of nature are not important in Spinoza's metaphysics, that they "do not figure in the official ontology" or play "much of an explanatory role."[57] After all, the phrase "law of nature" (*lex naturae*) does not occur anywhere in Part 1. The phrase "the laws of God's nature" occurs with some frequency, but it's not obvious what the connection is between that language and "the laws of nature" simpliciter. To see the connection will require an argument, which must begin with Spinoza's definitions of substance, attribute, and mode. In E1d3 Spinoza says that:

> By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed.

In E1d5 he adds:

> By mode I understand the affections of a substance, *or* what is in another through which it is also conceived.

What does it mean to say that a thing *is in itself*? That it is *conceived through itself*? Or that it *is in another, through which it is conceived*? A long tradition, going back to Bayle, would say: "Spinoza must mean that a thing is in itself if and only if it is an ultimate subject of predication, and that a thing is in another if and only if it is (ultimately) a property of something which exists in itself." This reading can claim a Cartesian pedigree, as Bayle was at pains to argue.[58]

But there are well-known problems about assuming that this is what Spinoza means when he uses the terms "substance" and "mode." Since Spinoza holds [E1p14] that there's only one substance, God, and that particular things are modes of God [E1p15, E1p25c], it would seem to follow that my coffee cup must

[57] The quote here is from Schliesser, "Huenemann Review," cited above. But he has articulated this view at greater length in Schliesser, "Philosophy of Science."

[58] See particularly Remark DD in his *Dictionaire* article on Spinoza, in Bayle, *Pour une histoire*, 603–12, and in English translation in Bayle, *Dictionary*, 329–38. Bayle is quite insistent on this, replying to unnamed critics who have told him he misunderstood Spinoza, that he took Spinoza to be using the terms "mode" and "modification" in the same sense as Descartes, Gassendi, and the other new philosophers.

somehow be a property of God. It's not obvious how we are to make sense of this. Bayle offered one solution when he suggested that Spinoza meant that the properties we attribute to my coffee cup—being brown, made of clay, heptagonal, etc.—are really properties of God. But such solutions bring with them their own difficulties, the most serious of which is probably this: particular things come into being, pass away, and frequently change their properties; Spinoza's God is eternal and immutable [E1p19, E1p20c]. That could not be, if he changed every time my coffee cup changes, and ceased to exist when it does.[59] So Spinoza could not accept Bayle's suggestion without giving up a proposition central to his metaphysics.

Bayle's contention that Spinoza's conception of mode is both Cartesian and predicative is very much alive in Spinozistic studies. Here's Bennett, in fine form, commenting on my account of the definition of "mode":

> Notice how radical and improbable Curley's thesis is. It credits Spinoza not only with silently depriving 'mode' of half the meaning it had in Descartes's idiolect and in the Latin language generally, but with positively implying that he has not done so. I allude to [Spinoza's] defining 'mode' in terms of 'state.' The Latin for that is *affectio*, which Curley translates as 'affection': that is a tolerable archaism, since 'affection' used to mean 'quality or property or state.' If Curley thinks that Spinoza's *affectio* means something else, and if he also means that same thing by his 'affection', he does not say what it is. And if that is not his view, he must concede that according to his theory Spinoza has defined 'mode' just about as misleadingly as he could possibly have done.[60]

When Bennett says that my interpretation has Spinoza depriving 'mode' of *half* the meaning it had in Descartes, he's referring to the fact that Descartes defines substances sometimes as ultimate subjects of predication and sometimes as beings causally independent of anything else.[61] My interpretation focuses resolutely on the causal idea, and ignores the notion of predication as irrelevant.

Here one question we need to ask is whether Spinoza would have considered himself bound by Descartes's usage, or that of any other predecessor, and if so, to what extent. In E3, admitting that his definitions of the affects differ from the usual definitions of these affects, Spinoza writes:

[59] Bayle mentions three principal difficulties in Remark N. Without conceding that the others are not serious, I focus on the one which seems most difficult for predicative interpreters to evade. For a fuller discussion of Melamed's attempt, see Curley, "Metaphysics Revisited," 11–13.

[60] Bennett, *A Study*, 93.

[61] Or anything else but God. For the first conception of substance see d5 of the geometrical appendix to the *Secundae responsiones* (AT VII 162/CSMK II 114); for the second, see *Pr. phil.* I 51–2 (AT VIIIA 24–5/CSMK I 210). For discussion see Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 4–18.

> I know that in their common usage these words mean something different. But my purpose is to explain the nature of things, not the meaning of words. I intend to indicate these things by words whose usual meaning is *not entirely opposed to* the meaning with which I wish to use them. One warning of this should suffice. [E3 Def. Aff. 20 expl. (O IV 326/G II 195/C I 535–6), my emphasis][62]

Unfortunately it did not, because many commentators on Spinoza continue to insist that Spinoza be held to common usage (either scholastic or Cartesian). Spinoza makes this comment immediately after his definitions of favor and indignation. But the comment does not apply only to those definitions. His definition of love also diverges from Descartes's definition (and from much prior usage), a fact he notes in his explanation of the definition [cf. E3 Def. Aff. 6 (O IV 322/G II 192–3/C I 533)]. Nor does it apply only to the definitions of the affects. His definition of essence at E2d2 departs from customary usage, as E2p10s makes clear. The needs of theory—of defining things in a way which will aid in explaining them—take precedence over the need to follow ordinary usage.

Spinoza defines "mode" as an *affectio* of substance, and in ordinary Cartesian usage *affectio* is a synonym for quality.[63] But Spinoza might perfectly well have meant by *affectio* something other than what Descartes meant by it. On my reading he does, and tells us what that something else is in the continuation of E1d5. Recall the full text of that definition:

> By mode I understand the affections of a substance, *or* (sive) what is in another, through which it is also conceived. [E1d5][64]

You might think (many do) that in Spinoza's work the use of *sive* generally signifies that the term or phrase before the *sive* and the term or phrase after it are equivalent. And you might then argue that since *affectio* means 'quality,' that is what the final clause must also mean. If this were correct, then the final clause would explain what it means to say that one thing exists in another, by equating that phrase with *affectio*.

I reject that argument. It's a common assumption that in Spinoza *sive* links two terms or phrases he intends to equate, taking the first in its ordinary meaning and asserting that the second is equivalent to it in that sense. If that were correct here, it would support Bennett's reading of E1d5. But though *sive* often signifies that

[62] In my annotation I conjecture that the meaning assigned to a word will not be entirely opposed to its usual meaning if the extension of the term, as newly defined, significantly overlaps its extension as ordinarily defined.

[63] See Gilson, *Index*, 9.

[64] *Per modum intelligo substantiae affectiones, sive id quod in alio est, per quod etiam concipitur.*

kind of equivalence in Spinoza, it doesn't reliably do so.[65] Sometimes he uses *sive* to link phrases which are neither equivalent nor credibly meant to be treated as equivalent.[66] And sometimes he uses it to introduce a distinctively Spinozistic equivalence, an analysis of a philosophical term which most philosophers of his day would have defined differently, but which he wishes to define in a new way. In a note I give several examples.[67] Here, I think, that's what Spinoza is doing: using *sive* to tell us how he wishes a term familiar in the works of other philosophers to be understood in *his* philosophy. We should think of these as theoretical redefinitions of a concept. One advantage of understanding E1d5 in this way is that we can then understand how Spinoza can go on to say that:

> Particular things are nothing but affections of God's attributes, *or* (*sive*) modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way. [E1p25c]

We need not exercise our ingenuity trying to make sense of the proposition that particular things are somehow properties of God, as both Bennett and Melamed do (in different ways).

Here's another reason for understanding E1d5 in the way I suggest. In the *TIE*, Spinoza explains what he means by the language he uses to define substance and its modes:

> Our ultimate end requires that a thing be conceived either through its essence alone or through its proximate cause. If the thing is in itself, *or*, as is commonly [*vulgo*] said, is the cause of itself, then it must be understood through its essence alone. But if it is not in itself, but requires a cause to exist, then it must be understood through its proximate cause. [*TIE* §92 (O I 122/G II 34/C I 38–9)]

So for a thing to be a substance, to exist in itself, it must be its own cause (and be understood through its essence alone); for it to be a mode, to exist not in itself, but in another, it must be caused by that other (and understood through that other). This is, I think, the only passage in which Spinoza explains what he means by the contrast between being in oneself and being in another; so we ought not to

[65] I gave a flawed sketch of the multiple senses of *sive* in C II 610–12, and offer an improved version in the forthcoming Hübner and Steinberg, *Cambridge Lexicon*.

[66] Examples of uses which can't plausibly be understood as signifying an equivalence: "corporeal *or* extended" [E1p15s1 (G II 5 l.13)]; fear of loss *or* hope of profit [*TP* 3.14 (O V/124/G III 290, l.11/C II 523)]; to marry *or* to have children [*TP* 7.20 (O V/178/G III 316, ll.3–4/C II 554].

[67] Theoretical redefinitions: the equation of a thing's being in itself with its being causa sui in *TIE* §92 (O I 122/G II 34/C I 38–9); the equation of an idea with a mental history of nature in *CM* I.6 (G I 246/C I 312); the analysis of a miracle in *TTP* 6.22 (O III 248/G III 85/C II156); the reduction of faith to obedience in *TTP* 14.8 (O III 468/G III 174/C II 265); the reduction of natural right to power in *TTP* 16.3 (O III 504/G III 189/C II 282); and the reduction of God to Nature in E4pref and P4 (O IV 342, 352/G II 206, 213/C I 544, 548–9).

dismiss it lightly.[68] I take it that the reason why Spinoza adopts this reforming definition is that he thinks attaching a causal sense to the language of substances and modes provides a more useful way of organizing science than attaching a predicative sense. The fundamental principle of our understanding of reality is the fact that everything which exists has a cause, either in itself or in something else.

One popular line of objection to my view seems to be that it leads to an interpretation which is not very interesting. Here's Carriero, in an influential passage:

> In Curley's eyes, Spinoza's initially striking thesis that things (besides God) are modes of God collapses into the rather more familiar thesis that things (besides God) are (efficiently) causally dependent on God. To my mind, such a reading disappointingly flattens Spinoza's position. [Carriero, "Mode and Substance," 254]

What Carriero evidently means by that is that my reading turns Spinoza's 'initially striking thesis' that everything other than God is a mode of God into a 'comparatively uninteresting commonplace': that God is the (efficient) cause of all things other than himself. (Cf. Carriero, "Mode and Substance," 273.) Both Melamed and Schliesser have followed Carriero in making this objection, even to the use of the 'flattening' metaphor.[69]

Now I agree that if my reading of the claim that everything other than God is a mode of God came to nothing more than what Carriero suggests, it would be rather unexciting. Spinoza would be saying nothing more than what many philosophers had said before him. And if the story you tell about God's efficient causality is, say, the creation story in Genesis—as it has been for many of those philosophers—where God's willing something into existence is sufficient to bring it into existence, immediately—then it's a pretty simple story. But I think Carriero and the others who have followed him in making this criticism have not really grasped the way I was thinking about the causality of God in Spinoza. On my view, God, conceived as the fundamental laws of nature, has two kinds of effect: the infinite modes, necessary and universal features of the world, lower-level laws which follow from the laws of God's nature without any further information being required; and finite modes, local facts about the existence and actions of

[68] So far as I can discover, the most extended attempt to justify disregarding this passage occurs in a long footnote in John Carriero, "Mode and Substance," 261, n. 33. I can't deal with it in full detail here, but I will make the following observations: the point of citing *TIE* §92 was not that it gives an account of substance, but that it gives an account (the only one I'm aware of) of what Spinoza means by "existing in itself," the notion he will later use to define substance; it's true that in *TIE* §92 Spinoza opposes the notion of existing in itself to not existing in itself, and not to existing in another, but I take E1a1 to imply that not existing in itself is equivalent to existing in another; the question whether Descartes's views about substance were sufficiently accepted to justify the *vulgo* is irrelevant; Spinoza is not appealing to ordinary (Cartesian) usage to justify his definition; he is offering to explain what *he* intends to understand by existing in se in language familiar from the Cartesian tradition.

[69] Cf. Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 43, and Schliesser, "Huenemann Review," 824.

finite things, which follow from the laws of God's nature only if those laws are conjoined with statements about other finite things, past or present. The series of infinite modes, leading back from a lowest-level law to the laws of God's nature, is finite and timeless; the series of prior finite modes extends back into the infinite past, each member having a definite location in time and a definite location. It's not a simple story. So I have avoided using the language of efficient causality to articulate God's relation to his modes (even though Spinoza himself uses it in E1p16c1 and E1p25). I think it's misleading. It does not suggest the fundamental role the laws of nature play in God's causality. It's not a commonplace that they play such a role.

To see that it's nonetheless true—that Spinoza does conceive the first cause of all things to be that set of laws which are the most basic assumptions of the unified science we hope to discover, and that everything else follows from those laws, in one way or another—we must get deeper into God's causality than we have so far. In particular, we must explain why I said earlier that the idea of a law of nature is present in part 1 of the *Ethics* even though the phrase *lex naturae* does not occur there.

Consider the various passages in E1 where the notion of a law appears, but not as a part of the phrase "law of nature." The first occurs toward the end of E1p15s:

> All things, I say, are in God, and all things that happen, happen solely through the laws of God's infinite nature, and follow from the necessity of his essence. [E1p15s (O IV 122/G II 60/C I 424)]

The first question to ask about this is: what are 'the laws of God's infinite nature'? We haven't encountered this phrase previously in the *Ethics* and Spinoza does not define it. But a natural conjecture would be that they are the laws which express the fundamental nature of each of the infinitely many attributes God consists of. Spinoza does not identify any of God's attributes until the beginning of E2, so he won't talk about the laws of any specific attribute in E1. But he can talk generally about the laws involved in God's attributes and he does. The passage from E1p15s is only the first of several in the second half of E1 which refer to things following from the necessity of God's nature or essence, or to their following from the laws of his nature, or both. In E1p16 Spinoza tells us that infinitely many things must follow from the necessity of the divine nature; from E1p16c1 we learn that this is the reason why God is the efficient cause of all things.

This much is plain enough in the text, and a major departure from conventional theism, which would agree that God is the efficient cause of all things, but normally makes creation a contingent act of the will of a personal God, not a logical consequence of God's nature. E1p17 reiterates that God acts from the laws of his nature alone. The demonstration of that proposition connects these notions: to say that things follow from the necessity of the divine nature alone is

the same as saying that they follow from the laws of God's nature alone. But what are the laws of God's nature? E1p21 tells us that:

> All things which follow from the absolute nature of *an attribute of God* have always had to exist and be infinite .... (my emphasis)

So the laws of God's nature are laws which express the nature of one or another of his attributes. This makes an essential connection between the theology of E1 and the commitment to a unified science which I claim enables us to understand the theology.[70] A commitment to divine determinism may be a commonplace (at least in some theistic circles); but a commitment to a unified science is not, particularly as Spinoza understands the notion of a unified science, as involving a deductive system whose ultimate assumptions are both necessary and inherently knowable. (More about knowability later.)

E1p21 introduces a series of eight propositions which characterize the causal relationship between God and the modes whose existence he determines. Some follow from 'the absolute nature' of one of the divine attributes (E1p21–3), which I take to mean that they follow from the nature of the attribute, the laws defining that attribute, without the assumption of any other truths (cf. E1p28s), as the theorems of an axiomatic system follow from the axioms.[71] Since the attributes are infinite, eternal, and immutable, anything which follows from them alone must also be infinite, eternal, and immutable. Other modes, finite modes which express an attribute of God in a certain determinate way (E1p25c, E1p28), don't follow from the absolute nature of an attribute, but nevertheless follow from, or are determined to exist and act by, God, or an attribute of God, insofar as it is modified by a finite mode. This, on my reading, is a reflection of the fact that particular events in nature do not follow from the laws of nature alone, but from those laws in conjunction with information about other events or states of affairs necessary for their deduction from the laws. We've seen above that the need for such information was an acknowledged part of scientific practice in both Descartes and Spinoza. And our analysis of *TIE* §§99–103 has shown that Spinoza recognized both the infinite modes and the finite modes as having a role to play in the causation of 'singular, mutable' things.

[70] I've been helped to understand this stretch of text by correspondence with Prof. Gueroult. Sometime in the 1970s I had sent him a copy of an article of mine (Curley, "Recent Work") which criticized him for not making more use than he did of the concept of a law of nature in his commentary on E1. In reply he wrote that, in addition to the mention on Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, 250, he had also spoken of them in *Spinoza I*, 270ff., where "j'établis qu'elles sont identiques à la nécessité qui lie les effets, non sans doute aux séries elles-mêmes, mais à la nécessité selon laquelle sont liés les termes de ces séries. Que loi et nécessité soient identiques, cela saute déjà aux yeux du fait que Spinoza dit indifférement *Dieu agit par les seules lois de sa nature* et *Dieu agit par la seule nécessité de sa nature*" (Gueroult's emphasis). I take it that Gueroult was assuming that the laws of God's nature are the laws of the nature of his attributes. This seems obvious once it's put that way, but I hadn't seen it.

[71] See my discussion above (in note 53) of Spinoza's use of the term *onmiddelijk* in the *KV*.

These propositions tell us what a mode must be like if it follows from the absolute nature of one of God's attributes—it must be infinite and eternal—and what kind of cause it must have if it is not infinite and eternal: it must be caused by an infinite series of similarly finite modes (conjoined with a finite series of infinite modes). But why should there be some modes which follow from the absolute nature of a divine attribute and others which don't. Put another way: why does God have some effects which are infinite and eternal and others which are finite and temporal? It is not allowed to answer this question by answering: "Thus it pleased the Lord."

The metaphysic I attribute to Spinoza explains these things. If the laws of extended nature can be organized into a deductive system whose axioms generate laws governing the behavior of all the many different kinds of extended thing, and if the truth of those laws requires the existence of general features of extended nature which are present always and everywhere, then there must be, in addition to the general features corresponding to the axioms, general features corresponding to the theorems. Because those theorems follow from the axioms of the system alone (from the absolute nature of an attribute of God), the features of nature which make them true must be infinite, eternal, and immutable. These are the infinite modes. But not everything which follows from the laws of nature follows from those laws alone. The particular proposition that the Earth will have, at a certain time next year, a certain position in relation to the sun, follows from Kepler's laws of planetary motion, but not from those laws alone. To employ the laws in predicting its position, say, on the 14th of July next year, we will need information about its position and velocity at some prior time(s).

My interpretation entails that Spinoza understood God's causality as bifurcated in this way; I think it is well grounded, by consideration both of Spinoza's own texts and of the Cartesian context. But this interpretation also has broader implications for our understanding of Spinoza's philosophy: it entails that Spinoza is not committed to holding, as critics since the time of Leibniz have charged, that the actual world is the only possible world. I've discussed this rather fully elsewhere,[72] so I'll be brief here. If Spinoza holds that the explanation of any particular event requires appeal both to the laws of nature and to antecedent conditions, then we can specify a procedure for generating a description of a world different from the actual world, but consistent both in itself and with the laws of nature. Take any particular proposition true in the actual world, say, "Spinoza died in The Hague in 1677."[73] Deny it and then deny one or more of the antecedent

[72] In *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, ch. 3, but more recently in Curley and Walski, "Necessitarianism Reconsidered" and Curley "Metaphysics Revisited," 15–22.

[73] The example is suggested by Bayle's argument, in his *Dictionary* article on Chrysippus, that Spinoza is committed to holding that all false propositions—his example is "Spinoza died in Leiden"—must involve a contradiction. He maintains that, like Spinoza's contention that everything which exists exists in God, that claim involves "an absurdity diametrically opposed to common sense."

conditions which, in conjunction with the laws of nature, entail that Spinoza died at that time and in that place. To get a consistent set of propositions we would need to repeat this procedure infinitely many times (and extend it to the infinitely many future consequences of Spinoza's death in The Hague). So it would be beyond the power of any human to carry out the procedure. But that doesn't matter. What matters is that an infinite intellect could grasp a world possible in itself, but different from the actual world as regards the particular events which occur in it. So if Spinoza is to be consistent with what I maintain is his understanding of God's causality, the actual world is not the only possible world. There are many possible worlds.[74]

I don't think any aspect of my interpretation has been more controversial than this one. Some critics hold it to be inconsistent with Spinoza's denial that there is anything contingent in nature (E1p29) and his claim that God could not have produced things in any other way or order (E1p33).[75] I reply, first, that if saying that all things happen according to God's governance is equivalent to saying that they happen according to the laws of nature,[76] and if those laws are intrinsically necessary, then it will be true, as E1p33 maintains, that God could not have produced things in any other way than the way he did. God's actions are necessitated by his nature, not contingent.

Second, my interpretation can also give a perfectly good sense to E1p29: any particular finite proposition will be a logically necessary consequence of its antecedent conditions (plus the laws of nature), which is one of the two ways in which Spinoza allows that things can be necessary (in E1p33s1); and any laws necessary for that deduction will be, in themselves, logically necessary, because they follow from the nature of the kind whose behavior they describe, which is the other of the two ways in which Spinoza thinks propositions can be necessary (E1p33s1 again). I add that although Leibniz did accuse Spinoza of holding that the actual world is the only possible world, he sometimes acknowledged that E1p33s1 counts against his reading of Spinoza's necessitarianism in the *Theodicy*.[77]

The proposition Bayle attributes to Spinoza is clearly inconsistent with E1p33s1, which denies that everything is necessary by reason of its essence.

[74] This is not to deny that there's a sense in which the actual world is the only possible world. If you think of the world, not as a four-dimensional entity, with a history extending into the past and the future (as Leibniz did), but as a 'time-slice' of such a world, defined by the totality of propositions true at any given moment, then determinism entails that each world will be the only one possible at that time. This is not what Leibniz had in mind when he accused Spinoza of denying the existence of a plurality of possible worlds, but it may be the most important way of construing necessitarianism from the standpoint of assessing people's responsibility for their actions. It entails that for any given human action it could not have been otherwise, given the laws of nature and the prior history of the world.

[75] The best critique I know seems to me to be Don Garrett, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism," which should be read, not in its original version of 1991 (Garrett, "Necessitarianism 1991"), but in its later version, (Garrett, "Necessitarianism 2018") which adds a substantial postscript to the original.

[76] As Spinoza will maintain in *TTP* 3, to be discussed below.

[77] I owe this point to Ursula Goldenbaum, in correspondence about a draft of Curley, "Metaphysics Revisited." For a fuller discussion, see pp. 15–22 of that article.

Not everyone is satisfied with this response. Don Garrett has objected that though my interpretation makes every particular finite thing follow necessarily from other things (some of them eternal and necessary, others temporally prior and in themselves contingent)—a situation Leibniz might describe as their being only 'hypothetically necessary'[78]—it must leave the totality of finite things absolutely contingent. And that, he argues, would have been unacceptable to Spinoza, since he takes that totality to be a mediate infinite mode of God—the *facies totius universi* mentioned above—and all of God's infinite modes follow from the absolute nature of some divine attribute.[79] Now I've had difficulty seeing how the totality of finite modes could follow from the absolute nature of a divine attribute when no individual finite mode does. But the more fundamental question is whether this objection assumes a correct theory of the infinite modes. Garrett's interpretation of the mediate infinite mode of extension is common, but I think mistaken. Since any interpretation of the mediate infinite mode must depend crucially on Ep 64, about which there is much confusion, I'll defer further consideration of that issue until later.

Some interpreters have thought that E1p16—which says that infinitely many modes follow from the necessity of the divine nature—commits Spinoza to denying the reality of change.[80] If everything which exists follows with absolute necessity from something which is itself absolutely necessary, then the things which follow must themselves be absolutely necessary, which implies that they must be as timeless and immutable as their cause. The change which we think happens all around us must be an illusion. Hostile critics of Spinoza, like Bayle,[81] might pronounce this yet another example of his holding a view "diametrically opposed to common sense." On my interpretation there is no need to attribute any such consequence to Spinoza. On my reading the laws of God's nature from which the existence of particular modes follows are a necessary, but not in themselves sufficient, condition for the existence of the modes. We require information about the antecedent circumstances to complete the explanation. I count this as an advantage of my interpretation, not on the 'charitable' ground it provides a rationale for

[78] e.g. in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §13.

[79] See particularly Garrett, "Necessitarianism 2018," 126–30. Della Rocca's *Spinoza* offers a similar account, 69–78.

[80] See, for example, Joachim's *'Ethics' of Spinoza*, discussed in my *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 20–8.

[81] In this chapter I generally treat Bayle as a hostile critic, as he certainly appears to be. But Bayle is a difficult author, and I have long wondered whether the surface reading is correct. Although he does condemn the system of the *Ethics* vehemently as *la plus monstrueuse hypothèse qui se puisse imaginer, la plus absurde et la plus diamétralement opposée aux notions les plus évidentes de notre esprit*—a distinction for which the *Ethics* is a fair candidate, if you interpret Spinoza as Bayle does—he also reports that some of Spinoza's followers had complained that he hadn't understood Spinoza's teaching. I find it difficult to be sure exactly what his view of Spinoza is. I discussed this matter briefly in *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 17–18, and again in "Spinoza's Metaphysics Revisited," 9–10. I sympathise with Gianluca Mori who finds himself forced to conclude that the question of Bayle's sincerity is "*indécidable, quoique absolument légitime*" (Mori, *Bayle philosophe*, 9).

denying that Spinoza is committed to an unpalatable conclusion, but on the ground that it helps us see why Spinoza's system is free of the gross inconsistency he would incur if he denied the reality of change. The passages in his work which acknowledge the occurrence of change are many.[82] Nowhere does he defend the conclusion his critics draw from E1p16.

Above I called attention to language in the *TIE* and the *KV* which indicated that we should identify Spinoza's God, not with the whole of nature, as many commentators do, but with what the *TIE* called "the first elements of the whole of nature." Before we leave E1 we should consider what it contributes to illuminating this issue. Spinoza takes up this topic in E1p29s:

> I wish to explain here…what we must understand by *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. For from the preceding I think it is already established that by *Natura naturans* we must understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, *or* [*sive*] such attributes of substance as express an eternal and infinite essence, i.e. (by P14C1 and P17C2), God, insofar as [*quatenus*] he is considered as a free cause. But by *Natura naturata* I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, *or* [*sive*] of any of God's attributes, i.e., all the modes of God's attributes, insofar as [*quatenus*] they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God. [E1p29s (O IV 140/G II 71/C I 434)]

In my view, this clearly identifies God with *Natura naturans*, one division of the whole of nature. But some recent interpreters have fastened on the two *quatenus* clauses as showing that we should identify Spinoza's God with the whole of nature. Steven Nadler, for example, has argued that:

> If, as E1p29s claims, *Natura naturans* just is God, "insofar as he is considered as a free cause," it would seem to follow that *Natura naturata* is also God, insofar as he is considered in some other way.[83]

If this were correct, we might have expected Spinoza to say something like that when he goes on to explain what *Natura naturata* is. But he doesn't. Instead he says that *Natura naturata* consists of all the modes of God's attributes "insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God." There's nothing here about God's being considered "in some other way." And this "in some other way" is pretty vague. The most natural way to eliminate the vagueness—"God insofar as he is considered not to be a free

[82] To mention only two examples which come easily to mind: *TIE* §§100–1 and E3pref.
[83] Nadler, *Spinoza's 'Ethics'*, 83.

cause"—is unattractive. Any conception of God which makes him not a free cause must, by E1p17c2, involve a contradiction.

Melamed encounters the same problem. He concedes that at first sight P29S does seem to provide a clear endorsement of the view that Spinoza identifies God with *Natura naturans*. But then, like Nadler, he fastens on the *quatenus* clauses, as showing that, despite appearances to the contrary, the passage does identify God with the whole of nature:

> According to the passage, *Natura naturans* is not God *simpliciter*, but rather 'God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause' .... Why would Curley's Spinoza qualify the identity of God and *Natura naturans*? If *Natura naturans* is identical with God only 'insofar as he is considered as a free cause,' it is at least possible that in another respect, God is not identical with *Natura naturans*.[84]

Here Melamed says merely that it's *possible* that "in another respect" God is not identical with *Natura naturans*. But it's evident that he thinks we should identify God with the complex of *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*:

> At several places in the *Ethics*, Spinoza speaks of God "not insofar as he is infinite" (see, e.g., E4p4d). He apparently uses this roundabout language because he feels uncomfortable describing God as finite or compelled. Yet Spinoza leaves no doubt that he takes finite modes to be God in some sense or respect.[85]

Now E4p4d does not actually say what Melamed implies it does. There Spinoza speaks of *the power of God* insofar as *it* is infinite, not of *God* insofar as *he* is infinite. But this gaffe is not critical. Spinoza does use the "not insofar as God is infinite" language elsewhere and we must be able to explain it.[86] More serious is his suggestion that Spinoza uses roundabout language because he would feel "uncomfortable describing God as finite or compelled." Not that it would be *false* to say that, mind you, just that Spinoza would find it uncomfortable.

Let's set aside the sheer, cloudy vagueness of the statement that Spinoza "takes finite modes to be God in some sense or respect." As Melamed develops his argument, he drops the qualifying phrase and rests his case on an analysis of E1p28d which concludes that "God has to *be* the finite modes... if he is to be the cause of all things, including finite modes."[87] Here we have the blunt assertion that if God is to *cause* finite modes, he must *be* the finite modes. On its face, that entails that

[84] Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 18.
[85] Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 18.
[86] In *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 18, n. 52, Melamed cites five passages: E2p9, E2p9cd, E2p12d, E2p19d, and E2p20d. Perhaps not all these passages are quite apposite, but there are other passages which are: notably, E2p40d and E5p36.
[87] Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 19. My emphasis.

he is finite and compelled (as well, of course, as being infinite and free). We ought to be able to do better than that.

Both Nadler and Melamed ignore the ambiguity of *quatenus*. That term can mean either "to the extent to which" (with reference to scope) or "inasmuch as" (with causal force).[88] If we take *quatenus* in the first way, we seem to make Spinoza say that God is *only to some extent* to be considered a free cause, that somehow he can legitimately be considered not to be a free cause. Not a happy result. But if we take *quatenus* in the second way, what Spinoza is saying is unproblematic: we call God *Natura naturans* because we take him to be a free cause; we call God's modes *Natura naturata* because we take them to be not free, but causally determined by something else. This is just what we should expect from the force of the two participles, one active, the other passive. E1p29s gives us no reason to think that Spinoza has changed his mind about the relation between God and nature. And it would be a change of mind. The *Short Treatise* has no reservations about speaking of *Natura naturans* as one division of the whole of nature. But like Nadler, Melamed does not mention this.

3.3.2 Laws of Nature in *Ethics* 2

At the beginning of Part 2 of the *Ethics*, Spinoza states it as an axiom that "The essence of man does not involve necessary existence" [E2a1]. He equates this with saying that "from the order of nature (*ordo naturae*) it can happen equally that this or that man does exist, or that he does not exist."

Prima facie, this strongly confirms our interpretation. Suppose that the *ordo naturae* refers to the eternal order of the laws of nature [cf. *TIE* §12]. The most natural interpretation of Spinoza's gloss is that though those laws determine an order which holds in in all possible worlds, there are many distinct ways in which they can be exemplified, all consistent with the laws of nature, but distinguished from one another by the particular individuals they contain and the different relations which obtain between those individuals.

Garrett has argued that my previous discussions of E2a1 have misconstrued the meaning of *ordo naturae*, that nearly all of Spinoza's uses of that phrase either suggest or imply that the order of nature includes, in addition to the laws of nature, "the prior order of finite modes." He contends that this must be true, specifically, of E2a1.[89] But this can't be true in all the cases where Spinoza uses that

[88] Cf. the Glare, ed., *OLD* entry on *quatenus*, B7 and B8. The English phrase typically used to render *quatenus*, "insofar as," has a similar ambiguity.

[89] See Garrett, "Necessitarianism 2018," 116, 123. I grant that Garrett is right to this extent: *often* when Spinoza talks about the order of nature, he does seem to include particular finite modes. Clear cases occur, I think, in E1p11d2, E2p7s, E2p29c&s, E2p30d, E4p4d, E4p4c. It seems that when

phrase.[90] And E2a1 seems an especially clear case where it can't be true. If the order of nature were to include, in addition to the laws of nature, all prior finite modes, then given Spinoza's determinism, it would not be a contingent matter whether a particular man exists; if this man exists, his existence would certainly follow from the conjunction of the laws of nature with the prior finite modes. Similarly if he does not exist.

We should note here that Spinoza allows for a sense in which even things which do not exist in the durational world have a kind of existence in the eternal world. This appears in the Corollary to E2p8c:

> So long as singular things do not exist, except insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes, their objective being, *or*, ideas, do not exist except insofar as God's infinite idea exists; and when singular things are said to exist, not only insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes, but insofar also as they are said to endure, their ideas also involve the existence through which they are said to endure. [E2p8c (O IV 170/G II 91/C I 452)]

Spinoza anticipates that many of his readers will find these ideas difficult, and tries, without great hope of success, to explain them in a difficult scholium I'll pass over.[91] Instead I offer the following suggestion: to say that a body of a certain kind is comprehended in the attribute of extension is to say that if we had adequate knowledge of the attribute of extension, we would be able to deduce, from the fundamental principles of extended things, the laws governing bodies of that kind, laws which would explain what conditions would be necessary for that body to exist at a particular time and place. If the conditions for the body's existence at a particular time and place are not realized, we can nonetheless say that it is a real possibility insofar as its existence is contained in the nature of God, as a way of contrasting this kind of body with the existence of bodies which the laws of physics do not permit. Spinoza, I think, would say that such a body has a kind of actuality, even if it never exists at any particular time or place. (Cf. E5p29s.)

As an example, we might take the atomic bomb. In 1939, two German scientists, Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassman, demonstrated that the uranium nucleus could be split into two or more parts. When word of this development reached the US, some physicists were initially incredulous. "That's impossible," Robert Oppenheimer is reported to have said.[92] But when a colleague demonstrated to

Spinoza intends to include finite modes as part of the *ordo naturae*, he modifies that phrase with additional language, e.g. *ordo totius naturae*; *communis naturae ordo*.

[90] Clear cases where it refers simply to the laws of nature occur, I would say, in *TTP* 3.7–3.8, and *TTP* 6 §§6–11, 19, 26, 39; CM II.9; E1p33d; E1p33s2; and E3pref (O IV 240 ll. 7–12/G II 137 ll. 7–15/C I 491 ll. 7–15).

[91] I did discuss E2p8s in *Spinoza's Metaphysics* 138–42. I think the discussion here is an improvement on the earlier treatment.

[92] See Bird and Sherman, *American Prometheus*, 166.

him that the atom could be split, he quickly realized the potential for using this reaction to create an immensely powerful bomb. Within a few years, the combined efforts of a great many people produced a bomb of the kind theory had predicted. Spinoza's knowledge of physics was, of course, very primitive by comparison with that of more recent scientists. But I think this example illustrates the kind of thing he had in mind.

In *Spinoza's Metaphysics* I suggested that the Physical Excursus which begins after E2p13s might show us what Spinoza thought the beginnings of a unified science of bodies might look like.[93] It begins with two axioms stating properties all bodies have: they are either in motion or at rest, and the speed of their motion varies from one time to another. The passage then proceeds to deduce a crude version of the principle of inertia from its prior assumptions.[94] It also states as an additional axiom a version of the law of reflection, formulated to apply to all bodies, not just light particles.

Viewed as a sketch of the beginnings of a physics, this passage is not very satisfactory. The status of the principle of inertia is unclear. Spinoza says that it follows from lemma 3. But if we trace the deductive ancestry of that lemma, it seems that E1p28 and E2p6 are doing more work than the one axiom of the Physical Excursus Spinoza cites. He also says the corollary is known per se, but then proceeds to give a lengthy argument for it, in which the axioms of the Physical Excursus play no obvious role. Moreover, the law of reflection is not deduced from any earlier statements; it's simply taken as an axiom.

I think Spinoza was conscious that this digression on bodies might disappoint readers who were expecting something else. At the end of this passage he writes:

> If it had been my intention to treat body more fully, I ought to have explained and demonstrated these things at greater length. But I've already said that I intended something else. [E2 lemma 7s (O IV 188/G II 102/C I 462)][95]

Here Spinoza refers to E2p13s, where he had argued that because the object of the idea constituting the human mind is the human body, we must have adequate knowledge of the nature of the body to understand certain things about the mind: the nature of its union with the body, how the human mind surpasses those of other things in nature, why the mind is capable of perceiving many things at once, why we have only a very confused knowledge of our own body, etc. So the

[93] Cf. my *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 60–1. I was not the first to suggest this. It goes back at least to Rivaud, "La physique," which I cited in 166, n. 2.

[94] E2 lemma 3c (O IV 182/G II 98/C I 459). 'Crude' because it states only that a body in motion will continue to move until determined by another body to rest, and similarly for bodies at rest. There is no reference to the fact that the body's tendency, of itself, to move will be for motion in a straight line, as Spinoza had stated the principle in his *DPP* IIp15 (G I 202/C I 277).

[95] I've modified my translation in C I to accept Shirley's rendering of *ex professo*.

Physical Excursus attempts to say only as much about bodies as Spinoza thinks he needs to demonstrate certain features of the mind, and does not claim to be an adequate account of the nature of bodies. I think the later correspondence indicates that at some point Spinoza came to have doubts about his original project for a unified science. But that's a topic we'll return to later.

Spinoza thought the axioms of the unified science were not only necessary truths, but also clear in themselves, needing no justification by inference from more fundamental principles. To understand why he thought this, we must understand his theory of common notions. Traditionally common notions are axioms, supposed to be 'known through themselves,'[96] and known to everyone. In E2p35–40 Spinoza develops a theory about how the common notions are formed, a theory designed to explain why they do not require extrinsic justification. Certain properties are common in the sense that they are common to all things; to be common to all things, they must be equally in the part and in the whole. And if that is true, they cannot be perceived inadequately (E2p38).

Though Spinoza states this proposition quite generally, as applying to all things, no matter what their attribute, the demonstrations of E2p38 and its corollary show that he is thinking here of bodies as his prime example. He begins the demonstration of E2p38 by postulating something common to all bodies. And in his argument for the corollary he cites a proposition from the Physical Excursus, that all bodies agree in certain things. The adequacy of our ideas of these common properties of bodies results from the way we necessarily form them. If the properties affirmed in these ideas are equally in the part and in the whole, then they are present in every body we experience (E2p39). So their ideas can't suffer from the kind of variability which affects our ideas of things which exemplify the natural kinds of scholastic-Aristotelian philosophy (E2p40s1). Humans vary greatly in their properties; so my idea of a human will inevitably differ from yours, depending on which humans we happen to have encountered most often. "Body" is a term referring to a kind of thing we all experience and all experience in the same way. So "body" is a term with a definite, universally agreed meaning that we can found a science on; "human" is not. This is why Bennett was right to argue that it is only general notions of a certain kind which Spinoza thinks are "unfit for serious theoretical use."[97] His dismissal of universals is a rejection of the species concepts prominent in Aristotelian philosophy, not a rejection of all universals.

Spinoza's theory of common notions, laid out in E2p38–40, has important implications for his metaphysics. E1p11 had told us that each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself. II P2 had claimed extension as an

[96] My preferred translation of *notum per se*. See the glosses on "axiom," "common notion," and "known through itself" in C I 626–7, 630, and 642–3.

[97] Bennett, *A Study*, 39.

attribute of the one substance. The theory of common notions asserts that anything which is common to all bodies, and equally in the part and in the whole, can only be conceived adequately. But if an attribute like extension can only be conceived adequately, then we cannot fail to see the truth of the laws implicit in its essence. They will be conceived through themselves, without requiring, or being susceptible of justification, by any more fundamental principle. But if they are conceived through themselves, they must also exist in themselves.

3.4 The Laws of Nature in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

It requires some interpretation to see the references to the laws of nature in Spinoza's discussions of the 'fixed and eternal things' in the *TIE* or 'the laws of God's nature' in E1. Not so in the *TTP*. There it is clear early in the work that Spinoza assigns them a central place in his ontology and gives them an important explanatory role. In *TTP* 3, after having criticized the anthropomorphic conception of God found in the biblical prophets and the doctrine that the Jews are God's chosen people, Spinoza offers us a philosophical alternative:

> By God's governance (*directio*) I understand the fixed and immutable order of nature *or* [*sive*] the connection of natural things. For we have said above, and shown elsewhere, that the universal laws of nature, according to which all things happen and are determined, are nothing but the eternal decrees of God, which always involve eternal truth and necessity. Therefore, whether we say that all things happen according to the laws of nature, or that they are ordered according to the decree and governance of God, we say the same thing. [*TTP* 3.7 (O III 152/G III 45–6/C II 112)][98]

This gives us a reductive analysis of the notion of God's governance: to say that God governs the world is to say that whatever happens in the world does so according to fixed and immutable laws, the laws of nature. That's clearly the import of the first and third sentences. The second is not so clear; it might suggest a reduction of the laws to the decrees of a personal God, in the manner of Descartes. But if we take the hint Spinoza gives us when he refers to what he has "said above," we'll see that the reduction goes the other way. The passage he's referring to is evidently *TTP* 1.44, where he dismisses talk of a revelation's happening by God's power as mere babbling unless it can be supported by an

[98] In C II, I used "guidance" to translate *directio* here. In retrospect this seems to me not a good choice, wrongly suggesting counsel rather than command. In citing the *TTP*, I use Bruder's division of the chapters into numbered sections, as found in the translation in C II, as opposed to the different system adopted in O III. So "*TTP* 3.7" designates Bruder §7 of ch. 3. The reader can find a table relating the one system to the other in C II 767–9.

explanation of the laws of nature by which the revelation is supposed to have been made. Talk of things happening by God's power is a promissory note, worth nothing without the backing of a scientific explanation.

TTP 4 clarifies the meaning Spinoza attaches to the phrase "law of nature." First he defines "law" in general as:

> that according to which each individual, or all or some members of the same species, act in one and the same fixed and determinate way. [*TTP* 4.1 (O III 180/G III 57/C II 125)]

Spinoza distinguishes two kinds of law which satisfy this definition: some depend on a necessity of nature; others depend on human agreements.[99] We've been concerned so far only with the first kind of law, which he says follows necessarily from the nature or definition of a thing. Later we'll consider the relation between the two kinds of law.[100] As an example of this kind of law, he offers a principle derived from Cartesian physics:

> It is a universal law of all bodies, which follows from a necessity of nature, that when one body strikes against another, the lesser body loses as much of its motion as it communicates to the other body. [*TTP* 4.2 (O III 180/G III 57–8/C II 125–6)]

Spinoza accepts this principle, but does not give a Cartesian account of its necessity. Things have natures, but those natures have not been created by the immutable will of a personal God. They are part of the structure of the universe. Spinoza's theory of these laws is a kind of regularity theory, insofar as it claims that things in nature—individuals, or some or all members of a species—always act in a regular way. That nature displays these patterns of behavior is part of what we're affirming when we say that everything in nature is governed by universal laws. So the laws, according to his official account in the *TTP*, are definitely part of nature itself, not merely statements about those regularities.

But we should not identify these laws simply with the several series of particular events which actually exemplify them. We should think of the patterns of regular behavior as distinct from their instances. Here I've appropriated an idea from Russell's *Lectures on Logical Atomism*, which rejected the view that universal statements could be reduced to an infinite conjunction of their instances. "All

[99] In C II 125, I rendered the phrase *ab hominum placito*, which I translated "by a human decision." That's not so much wrong, I now think, as less precise than it could be. I believe the context indicates that Spinoza is thinking of a collective decision of a number of humans. So "agreement" would be better than "decision."

[100] In "Spinoza's Conception of Law," Donald Rutherford has argued that the first kind of law grounds the second. I agree with that, for reasons to be explained below.

men are mortal" is not equivalent to "This man is mortal, and that man is mortal, etc." To get an equivalence you would need to add that "These are all the men there are." This was his argument for recognizing general facts, in addition to atomic facts, as part of the furniture of the universe. Mutatis mutandis, this seems to be the kind of view Spinoza would need to take about his laws of nature. If the laws are fixed and eternal things, their content is not exhausted by the instances of regularity which occur in the realm of singular, changeable things.[101]

We've seen one of the examples Spinoza offers of the first kind of law, the putative law of physics which says that a body which strikes against a smaller body loses as much of its motion as it communicates to the other body. This is, *very roughly*, one of the three fundamental laws of motion Descartes stated in his *Principia philosophiae* II 37–40, a 'law' Spinoza had already reformulated once in his geometric exposition of Descartes's *Principia* (*DPP* IIp20) and reformulates again here in *TTP* 4.2.[102] Spinoza thinks this law follows from the nature of bodies.

That's the kind of example we might expect from what we've said about the importance of Cartesian physics for Spinoza. The second isn't:

> It's a law which follows necessarily from human nature that when a man recalls one thing, he immediately recalls another like it, or one he had perceived with the first thing. [*TTP* 4.2 (O IV 180/G III 158/C II 126)]

This is a near relative of the principle of human psychology Spinoza formulated in E2p18, a principle which has considerable systematic importance for Spinoza, since he claims it enables us to understand what memory is (E2p18s).

In *TTP* 6, Spinoza makes what is perhaps the most daring claim in this work: that there are, and can be, no miracles. Even such skeptics about miracles as Montaigne, Hobbes, and Hume would not go so far. They don't exclude the logical possibility of miracles; they just argue that the evidence for the occurrence of miracles has never been supported by the evidence adequate to make them credible (and perhaps cannot be so supported). That's an epistemological argument. Spinoza's argument is metaphysical. He claims to prove that the order of nature is "eternal, fixed, and immutable" (*TTP* 6.6) by appealing to the identity of will and intellect in God, which he says he has demonstrated in *TTP* 4. The idea is that since God necessarily understands things as they are, and his will is identical with his intellect, he must necessarily will things as they are. It follows that the universal laws of nature follow from the necessity and perfection of the divine

[101] The idea that their content *is* exhausted by such regularities will be particularly unappealing to philosophers who think that there are genuine laws which have no instances, as Spinoza seems to think in E2p8.

[102] I note that in Descartes, *Principles Miller&Miller*, 61n, the editors Valentine and Reese Miller judge this law to be "one of the principal sources of error in [Descartes's] physics."

nature. If something happened in nature which was contrary to those laws, it would necessarily be contrary to God's decree, intellect, and nature (*TTP* 6.7–12).

In annotating this passage (C II 154, n. 3), I asked whether it can really represent an argument Spinoza himself would accept, since it attributes both will and intellect to God. If the chronology I'm assuming is correct, he had already claimed to show, in E1p31, that will and intellect belong to *Natura naturata*, not *Natura naturans*. They don't belong to God, though they are among the effects of God. So I suggested that we might regard the argument in *TTP* 4 as an ad hominem argument against Descartes, and anyone else who affirms the identity of will and intellect in God.[103] The claim would be that they cannot, consistently with their doctrine concerning the identity of will and intellect in God, allow that there are any events contrary to the laws of nature.

Perhaps this is disappointing. We might prefer for Spinoza to have given us an argument for this conclusion from premises he accepted. But if the Cartesian assumption Spinoza relies on is not peculiar to Descartes, but widely held, for reasons his most important predecessors found persuasive, we might regard this argument as posing a dilemma for traditional philosophical theology: either give up the doctrine that in God will and intellect are identical or give up miracles.

In *TTP* 6.16–38, Spinoza argues that if there were miracles, understood as works contrary to the order of nature (§19), they should make us doubt God's existence. To affirm his existence is to affirm that there is a fixed and immutable order in nature. To affirm the occurrence of miracles is to deny that order, i.e. to deny God's existence:

> When we know that all things are determined and ordained by God, that nature's operations follow from God's essence, indeed, that the laws of nature are his eternal decrees and volitions, we must conclude, absolutely, that the better we know natural things—the more clearly we understand how they depend on their first cause, and how they produce effects according to the eternal laws of nature—the better we know God and his will. [*TTP* 6.22 (O III 250/G III 85/C II 157)]

Since Spinoza had already written part 1 of the *Ethics* when he wrote this, we know we must discount some of this language as a concession to popular anthropomorphism. Stripped of that language, with its reference to God's will, volitions and decrees, it provides us with a useful gloss on E5p24: "the more we understand singular things, the more we understand God." Understanding singular things requires seeing how they follow from their first cause, the fundamental laws of nature. To understand those laws is to understand God. This may not be

[103] Both Maimonides and Aquinas seem to have agreed with Descartes about the relation between will and intellect in God. Cf. C II 131, n. 13, regarding *TTP* 4.23.

as exciting as believing that the whole universe is God; but at least it has the virtue of positing an intelligible causal relation between God and his modes.

Since Spinoza understands miracles as events contrary to the laws (or order) of nature,[104] he sometimes undertakes to explain how something which seemed to be a miracle in that sense can be explained by the laws themselves. This can illuminate his understanding of scientific method. Consider the miracle reported in Joshua 10. When Joshua was battling the armies of the five kings of the Amorites, he wanted the day to be longer, to give his army time to defeat the enemy. There's some confusion in the narrative about how this happened. Part of the story is in poetry; part in prose. In the poetic verses, which scholars take to be earlier, Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and the sun and the moon both ceased their motion. In the prose verses which frame the poetic, the sun's coming to rest occurred because the Lord "acted on words spoken by a man" and caused it to stand still.[105] It looks as though a later editor, troubled by the earlier version's attribution of a supernatural power to a human being, may have removed that difficulty by making the event happen only through divine intervention.

When Spinoza discusses this story, as he does twice (in *TTP* 2.26–7, and 6.55–6), he does not mention this complexity. He does, both times, make the now familiar point that Joshua and the others present were hampered in their understanding of the event by their ignorance of heliocentric astronomy. But in *TTP* 2.27 he adds a speculation about a possible natural cause of the light's longer duration. Those present:

> …did not consider that a refraction greater than usual could arise from the large amount of ice then in that part of the air. [*TTP* 2.27 (O III 126–8/G III 36/C II 101)]

and that this might be the true cause of the greater duration of the light. Spinoza does not insist that this was the real cause. After all, his knowledge of what occurred that day is limited to what the biblical narrative reports. That narrative does mention, in v. 11, that as the enemy were fleeing, a hail storm occurred which killed more of them than the Israelite swords had.

This discussion illustrates two points about Spinoza's understanding of scientific method. First, there's the point made earlier: that he recognizes both laws and antecedent conditions as essential to the scientific explanation of particular

[104] He uses both formulas and seems to regard them as equivalent. Cf. *TTP* 6.7–10 with 6.19. He does, of course, also offer an alternative definition of miracles in *TTP* 6.13–15, which makes them symptomatic of the lack of scientific understanding of those who believe in or relate the miracles. I take this to be a poisoned pawn, a concession to the opposition which they would be unwise to accept. Cf. my "Spinoza on Miracles."

[105] See the annotation in Meeks and Attridge, *Study Bible*. The quoted words come from the New JPS translation, as it appears in *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1999.

phenomena. His conjectured explanation of the lengthening of the day shows that he thinks the Israelites' ignorance of the laws of optics prevented them from appreciating the causal relevance of a particular circumstance they were well aware of. This leads to the second, more general point: Spinoza thinks that we may need to understand the laws of nature if we are to determine which particular circumstances, among the many current and prior circumstances, are causally relevant to the event we're trying to explain. This confirms our earlier discussion of *TIE* §§93, 100, and 103.

3.5 The Laws of Nature in *Ethics* 3 and 4

The Preface to *Ethics* 3 makes a new beginning for the *Ethics*, in which things implicit in the first two parts are made explicit. It's not that Spinoza changed his mind about the central ideas of his metaphysics, but he did become clearer about what those ideas are, and about what he needed to emphasize to make his ideas clear to others. He begins by criticizing previous writers about human behavior for treating us, not as natural things, which follow the common laws of nature, but as something outside nature, a dominion within a dominion, with absolute power to determine our own actions, and to disturb, rather than follow, the order of nature. In rejecting that view, Spinoza embraces what Michael Della Rocca has dubbed his "naturalism about human beings," which Della Rocca defines by two claims about laws:

> (1) There are laws or rules governing the psychological states [and actions] of human beings.

And:

> (2) These laws or rules are instances of more general laws or rules operative throughout nature.[106]

To support attributing these claims to Spinoza, Della Rocca cites this passage from the Preface:

> Nothing happens in nature [*natura*] which can be attributed to any defect in it, for nature [*natura*] is always the same, and its virtue and power of acting are everywhere one and the same, that is, the laws and rules of nature, according to

[106] Della Rocca, "Metaphysical Psychology." I've added the phrase in brackets because the first sentence of the Preface says, not only that men's affects follow from the laws of nature, but that their way of living (*ratio vivendi*) does also.

> which all things happen, and change from one form to another, are everywhere and always the same. So the way of understanding the nature of anything whatever must also be one and the same, namely, through the laws and rules of nature. [E3pref (O III 242/G II 138/C I 492)]

This has been an important passage for me, not just because it says that we must understand the laws of nature to understand what happens in nature, and particularly in human behavior, but also because I think it tells us something important about Spinoza's conception of God, namely, that he identifies God with the fundamental laws of nature, the most basic regularities we find in nature and ought to make the starting point for our explanations.[107]

Does Spinoza say that, explicitly, in this passage? No. But he does say that nature and its power of acting are always the same, and that this is equivalent to saying that the laws and rules of nature are everywhere and always the same. In what sense is he using the term *natura* in this passage? In its first occurrence he must be using it to refer to *Natura naturata*. That's the realm in which things happen. But when he uses it the second time, he must be referring to *Natura naturans*. He could not say, either of *Natura naturata* or of nature as a whole, that it is always the same. So it's the power of *Natura naturans* which is everywhere one and the same. Now since E1p29s equates *Natura naturans* with God, I would infer that we can identify God's power of acting with the laws of nature. Since God's power is his essence (E1p34), it seems fair to conclude that the laws of nature constitute God's essence.[108]

Spinoza is about to embark on a detailed account of human psychology, in which the importance of identifying laws of human behavior will be central. Della Rocca refers to this project as Spinoza's "metaphysical psychology," to emphasize that the laws of human psychology which Spinoza develops in E3 are supposed to be derived from a principle which is true generally of all things, and not only of human beings. Known as the *conatus* doctrine, this principle maintains, as my translation has it, that "each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being" (E3p6).[109] I agree with Della Rocca that this is a

[107] See Curley, *Geometrical Method*, 42–3, criticized by Melamed in *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 10–12.

[108] Of course it's only the *fundamental* laws of nature which are in question here. The axioms of the unified science are the only laws not derived from more basic laws, the laws which must be taken as needing no further explanation, as conceived through themselves. So they are the only laws which can properly be said to exist in themselves. The subordinate laws have a cause in the fundamental laws, and therefore can't be said to exist in themselves or be conceived through themselves. But I think Spinoza would say that because the subordinate laws are deducible from the fundamental laws, they are contained in them. Cf. E2p8.

[109] The Latin is: *Unaquaeque res, quantum in se est, in suo esse perseverare conatur.* Some critics of my translation (most notably: Della Rocca, in "Metaphysical Psychology," 235–43, and Garrett, "Necessitarianism 2018," 385) have thought that the phrase *quantum in se est* should be rendered "insofar as it is in itself," because they take the *esse in se* here to have the same meaning it has in the definition of substance. This is natural enough, and so Shirley and others have translated it. But this

metaphysical principle: Spinoza understands it to include a striving which *each thing* has, not merely to continue in its being, but also to increase its power of action and avoid decreases in that power.[110] Spinoza seems to have thought it evident that we have this tendency, as he thought it evident that no thing, "through its own nature," can strive for its own destruction.

In the remainder of this section I'll give examples of the laws he thought followed from these basic psychological tendencies, selected to show how they might be used to ground his moral and political theory. Consider the following passage from Part 4 of the *Ethics*:

> For men to be able to live harmoniously and help one another, they must give up their natural right [to consider their own advantage, according to their own mentality (P19, P20), to avenge themselves (E3p40c2), and to strive to preserve what they love and destroy what they hate (E3p28)] and make one another confident that they will do nothing which could harm others. How it can happen that men who are necessarily subject to affects (by E4p4c), inconstant and changeable (by E4p33), should be able to make one another confident, and have trust in one another, is clear from E4p7 and E3p39. No affect can be restrained except by an affect stronger than, and contrary to the affect to be restrained, and everyone refrains from doing harm out of fear regarding a greater harm. By this law, therefore, society can be established. [E4p37s2]

seems to be a mistake, both linguistically and philosophically. (I take the treatment of this proposition in O IV to be substantially in agreement with mine. See O IV 552–3.)

In the article cited in C I 277, n. 39 and 298–9, n. 15—I. Bernard Cohen, "'Quantum in se est'"—Cohen is primarily concerned with explaining Newton's use of this phrase. But he does so by setting Newton against the background of Descartes, Lucretius, and seventeenth-century commentators on, or translators of, their work. He concludes that:

> Newton no doubt intended that *quantum in se est* should imply 'naturally' in the new sense which Descartes had given to Lucretius' expression, and should also convey the concept of a limitation of a body's 'power' to maintain a state of rest or of uniform rectilinear motion .... Translators and commentators, unable to give equal emphasis to both meanings at once, have chosen to stick close to Newton's words, in the literal rendering 'as much as in it lies.' Because they have thereby stressed primarily the concept of a quantitative limitation of the inertial 'power' in bodies, their modern readers are apt to have lost the idea of 'naturally' or 'by its own force' which Newton and Descartes and the seventeenth-century students of Lucretius knew to be another essential part of the sense of *quantum in se est*. [Cohen, "'Quantum in se est'," 148]

Spinoza could not, of course, have known Newton's work, but he was a close reader of Descartes and an enthusiastic admirer of Lucretius.

That's a philological argument. Philosophically, the translation "insofar as it is in itself" is unfortunate insofar as it suggests that the property used to define substance, is one which admits of degrees and may be possessed to only a limited degree. (Cf. Della Rocca, "Metaphysical Psychology," 238–9.) Being *causa sui* (which is the gloss Spinoza gives for *esse in se* in *TIE* §92) is not a property which admits of degrees. It implies absolute independence of any external causes.

[110] This seems to me clearer in the *KV* (*KV* I.5) than it is in the *Ethics*, where the argumentation for E3p11–13 sometimes suggests a limitation to humans.

Now let's consider some of the propositions used to justify this conclusion:

> (E4p19): From the laws of his own nature, everyone necessarily wants, or is repelled by, what he judges to be good or evil.
>
> (E4p20): The more each one strives and is able to seek his own advantage, i.e., to preserve his being, the more he is endowed with virtue [i.e., by D8, power]; conversely, insofar as each one neglects his own advantage, i.e., neglects to preserve his being, he lacks power.
>
> (E3p40c2): If someone imagines that someone else, toward whom he has previously had no affect, has, out of hatred, done him some evil, he will immediately strive to return the same evil.

I could go on through the remaining citations, but I think the point is clear enough without further examples: Spinoza's argument for his normative claims relies heavily on his assumptions about human nature. His assumptions about the laws of human behavior help to ground his claims about how human beings should act.

3.6 Problems in the Letters

The later correspondence raises important questions for the interpretation proposed in this chapter: did Spinoza really believe that a final science would take the form I've said he did? and are these letters consistent with my account of the infinite modes? The relevant letters are mostly between Tschirnhaus and Spinoza; two are between Spinoza and Schuller, who generally (but with at least one exception) seems to be acting as a spokesman for Tschirnhaus.

The first letter begins by asking when Spinoza's readers can expect his method for acquiring knowledge of unknown truths and his work on general matters in physics [Ep 59, Tschirnhaus to Spinoza, January 1675 (G IV 268–70/C II 430–2)]. Tschirnhaus has read a manuscript of the *TIE* and discussed it with Spinoza when they met; he's also read a manuscript of the *Ethics* containing the Physical Excursus in E2. He's excited about both these works, and has questions about them. It's the second which is our primary concern. He thinks the Physical Excursus makes it possible to solve many difficulties in physics, but he asks Spinoza for an explanation of motion:

> Since extension, insofar as it is conceived through itself, is indivisible, immutable, etc., how can we deduce a priori that so many and such great varieties [of bodies], can arise, and consequently, the existence of a shape in the particles of some body, which shapes vary from one body to another, and are different from the

> shapes of the parts which constitute the form of another body? [Ep 59, Tschirnhaus to Spinoza, January 1675 (G IV 268/C II 431)]

When Spinoza replies, he answers some of Tschirnhaus's questions about the *TIE*, but defers answering the questions in physics, confessing that he hasn't yet written out his thoughts on those matters in an orderly way [Ep 60, Spinoza to Tschirnhaus, January 1675 (G IV 271/C II 433)].

In Ep 80 (May 1676), after some correspondence on other matters, Tschirnhaus returns to the questions on physics:

> I have great difficulty conceiving how the existence of bodies with motions and shapes is demonstrated a priori. For in extension, considered in itself, no such thing occurs. [Ep 80, Tschirnhaus to Spinoza, May 2, 1676 (G IV 331/C II 484)]

This seems to raise essentially the same difficulty, though on different grounds. The excursus says that bodies are distinguished from one another by their motion and rest, speed and slowness [E2 lemma 1 (O IV 180/G II 97/C I 458)]. But how can there be a variety of different bodies, with different motions? In Ep 59 what raises this question is that extension is supposed to be indivisible and immutable. In Ep 80, it's that there's nothing in the concept of extension itself which would explain this. The Physical Excursus takes it as an axiom that "Each body moves, now more slowly, now more quickly" [E2a2′ (O IV 180/G II 97/C I 458)]. This seems to make it an inherent property of bodies that they have some degree of motion—rather unexpectedly, since the immediately preceding axiom says that "All bodies are either in motion or at rest" [E2a1′ (O IV 180/G II 97/C I 458)]. But if the essence of bodies is extension, and all bodies have some degree of motion, then it should be possible to show that being extended entails being in motion. And how is it to be explained that different bodies have different degrees of motion?

Spinoza replies quickly. Tschirnhaus had written on the 2nd of May. Spinoza replies on the 5th, saying that:

> From extension, as Descartes conceives it (i.e., as a mass at rest), it is not only difficult to demonstrate the existence of bodies, as you say, but completely impossible. For matter at rest, insofar as it can by its own power,[111] will persist in its rest, and will not be set in motion, unless by a more powerful external cause. That's why I did not hesitate to say, previously, that Descartes' principles of natural philosophy are useless, not to say absurd. [Ep 81, Spinoza to Tschirnhaus, May 5, 1676 (G IV 332/C II 485)]

[111] Here I correct my translation at C II 485, to bring it into line with my translation of E3p6 in C I. Cf. note 109 above.

I cannot find that Spinoza has ever said this explicitly in any surviving writing; he may have said it in conversation Tschirnhaus or in a letter we don't have. In any case, his argument against deducing the existence of bodies from extension seems strong.

Tschirnhaus is not satisfied. When he replies, in Ep 82, he's not interested in criticizing Descartes as much as he is in prompting Spinoza to explain why he has a better alternative:

> Since you mentioned Descartes's opinion, that he can only deduce the variety of things from extension by supposing that God brought it about by causing motion in extension, I'd like you to oblige me by showing how, according to your meditations, the variety of things can be shown a priori from the concept of extension .... For you have not shown how [the variety of things] must follow necessarily from the essence of God, which Descartes believed surpassed man's grasp. [Ep 82, Tschirnhaus to Spinoza, June 23, 1676 (G IV 333/C I 485)][112]

Tschirnhaus is not concerned about explaining the existence of extension. He wants to know how extension comes to be diversified into a variety of particular extended objects, which, according to both Descartes and Spinoza, results from the various degrees of motion of particular portions of extension. Moreover, he assumes that Spinoza would want to explain the existence of a variety of extended things by deducing it from the essence of God, which he here equates with deducing it from the concept of extension. This is what we would expect from our analysis of the *TIE* and of E1 and E2, and so might be viewed as confirming our interpretation of those texts. But from the problems we've seen in the Physical Excursus we might suspect that Spinoza would not be prepared to deduce the variety of extended things from the concept of extension. And he isn't. In Ep 83 he writes:

> You ask whether the variety of things can be demonstrated a priori from the concept of extension alone. I believe I've already shown clearly enough that this is impossible, and that therefore Descartes defines matter badly by extension, but that it must necessarily be explained by an attribute which expresses eternal and infinite essence. But perhaps I'll pursue these matters more clearly with you some other time, if life lasts. For so far I have not been able to set out anything concerning them in an orderly way. [Ep 83, Descartes to Tschirnhaus, July 15, 1676 (G II 334/C II 487)]

At this point, unfortunately, Spinoza did not have long to live, and he never did what he was evidently hoping to do.

[112] A passage in Descartes which Tschirnhaus may have had in mind occurs in *Le monde*, chapter 6 (AT X 34/CSMK I 91).

What was that exactly? Ep 83 has suggested to some commentators—notably, Lewis Robinson[113]—that Spinoza envisioned a revised physics, which might succeed in deducing motion from matter by defining matter, not as extension, but by some other attribute, not named, and described only vaguely, as one "which expresses eternal and infinite essence." Robinson finds this development quite surprising and he's at a loss to suggest a suitable replacement attribute.

Gueroult suggested an alternative reading of these late letters, emphasizing the language of Ep 81 more than that of Ep 83.[114] On this view, which seems to me more likely, it's not that Spinoza proposes to replace the attribute of extension with some other, unnamed attribute. Spinoza had criticized the Cartesian conception of extension for its inadequacy as early as the *KV*, making essentially the same argument he did in Ep 81.[115] But he never wavers in asserting that extension is an attribute of God, "*une substance attributive*," as Gueroult puts it, cause of itself and of all its modes, i.e. of all modes involving the concept of extension. We cannot understand how it can be the cause of these modes, if we conceive it as Descartes had, as an inert mass, characterized only by length, breadth, and depth. We must conceive it as "*une puissance efficace*." This language is Gueroult's, though it was probably suggested by a passage he cites from later in the *KV*, which says, essentially, that if one thing produces another, there must be something in it…some power (*kragt*)…through which it can produce that rather than something else.[116] In itself this doesn't explain much. But a conviction that it's true might help to motivate the search for a more informative answer. And it does place some limits on what can count as an explanation. It can't be anything which might equally well produce the opposite effect. Free will, as Descartes conceives it in the *Principia philosophiae*, will not do.

What Gueroult has proposed seems right, in the sense that it does seem to capture what Spinoza was saying, under pressure from Tschirnhaus's questions. But it's extremely vague, and that seems hard to reconcile with the clarity and distinctness which is supposed to characterize our ideas of those attributes of God which we know at all. Our knowledge of God's essence is supposed to be adequate and perfect (E2p46–7), and adequate ideas are supposed to be clear and distinct (E2p38c). If they are not, I do not see how they can be conceived through themselves. And since what exists in itself must also be conceived through itself, this would be very damaging to their status as ultimate principles of explanation. I think this is a serious problem for Spinoza, not for my interpretation of Spinoza.

Our second question, concerning the mediate infinite mode of extension, arises in the exchange between Schuller and Spinoza in Ep 63 and Ep 64. Ep 63 bears Schuller's signature, though some of his questions clearly originated with Tschirnhaus. But probably Schuller was responsible for at least one of the

[113] See Robinson, *Kommentar* I, 260–1.
[114] See Gueroult, *Spinoza*, II, 150–1.
[115] See *KV* I.2.27 (O I 212/G I 27/C I 72–3).
[116] *KV* II.19.6 (O I 352–4/G I 90/C I 131).

questions himself. The question involves a misunderstanding I hesitate to attribute to Tschirnhaus. It asks for examples of things produced immediately by God (that is, the infinite modes of E1p21), and those produced by the mediation of some infinite modification (that is, the infinite modes of E1p22). So far so good. But then the question goes off track, remarking that:

> Thought and extension seem to me to be of the first kind; of the second kind, in thought, intellect; and in extension, motion, etc. [Ep 63, Schuller to Spinoza, July 25, 1675 (G IV 276/C II 437)]

I cannot think that Tschirnhaus, generally a careful reader of the *Ethics*, would have described thought and extension as infinite modes, particularly when a previous question correctly referred to them as attributes [Ep 63, Schuller to Spinoza, July 25, 1675 (G IV 275/C II 436)].

When Spinoza replies in Ep 64, he says more or less what the *KV* would lead us to expect about the immediate infinite mode of extension, that it is motion and rest.[117] Then he offers as an example of a mediate infinite mode of extension—the only example of a mediate infinite mode of any attribute he ever gives:

> …the face of the whole universe, which, however much it may vary in infinite ways, nevertheless always remains the same. On this see lemma 7s before E2p14. [Ep 64, Spinoza to Tschirnhaus, July 29, 1675 (G IV 278/C II 439)][118]

"The face of the whole universe" is the translation I gave of *facies totius universi* in C II, but I'm not happy with it. English-language translators often give the Latin this rendering, but it's clearly a metaphor. How can we explain the metaphor? I have a theory about that, which I'll come to shortly. Meanwhile, let's look briefly at an influential reading of this passage.

Scholars puzzling about Spinoza's meaning here have generally taken the reference to lemma 7s to be an important clue. There Spinoza explains, first, how a composite body composed only of the simplest bodies might retain its nature in spite of changes in its component bodies, and then, how bodies of increasing complexity might do the same. If we continue to infinity this process of conceiving increasingly complex bodies, we will easily conceive "the whole of nature to be one individual, whose parts, i.e., all bodies, vary in infinite ways without any change of the whole individual" [E2 lemma 7s (O IV 188/G II 102/C II 462)]. Garrett has dubbed this body 'the infinite individual,' and proposed it as the

[117] The *KV* had spoken only of motion as a universal (or infinite) mode of extension. I don't find the addition of the phrase "and rest" particularly surprising, since the principle of inertia applies both to bodies in motion and bodies at rest.

[118] *…facies totius universi, quae quamvis infinitis modis variet, manet tamen semper eadem, de quo vide Schol. 7. Lemmatis ante Prop. 14, p. 2.* Lemma 7s is on found in O IV 188/G II 101–2/C I 461–2.

infinite mode Spinoza is referring to when he offers the *facies totius universi* as an example of a mediate infinite mode of extension. And there is a short, sweet argument in favor of this view, which Garrett has made in comments on an earlier draft of this chapter: "Surely the individual in question is a mode of some kind. How could it be finite if Spinoza defines it as infinite?" So Garrett has not been without followers (and precursors).[119]

There is, however, a problem about this. E1p28d says plainly that no finite mode can follow from the absolute nature of an attribute. But the infinite modes *do* follow from the absolute nature of an attribute, either immediately (p21) or by the mediation of a mode which follows immediately (p22). How can an individual composed entirely of finite modes be an infinite mode? Won't that entail that the finite modes which compose it also follow from the absolute nature of God? Garrett paraphrased the statement in E1p28d in a way designed to avoid this problem:

> …no finite mode, *considered independently of its membership in* [*the total infinite series of finite modes*], would follow from the [absolute] nature of an attribute. [Garrett, "Necessitarianism 1991," 198]

And he suggested that perhaps the mediate mode of extension was, not the totality of bodies existing at one time, but the totality of bodies existing at all times, which would include all those bodies which formerly existed, and all those bodies which will exist.[120] Although it might be true that no body considered in isolation from its membership in that total series of bodies would follow from the absolute nature of the attribute of extension:

> Each finite mode would follow from the absolute nature of an attribute, but *only in virtue of its membership as part of the one consistently constructible or maximally perfect series of finite modes*.[121]

[119] Garrett "Necessitarianism 1991," 198 or "Necessitarianism 2018," 105, Garrett's italics. Similarly Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 74. Though Gueroult is not as explicit about this as Garrett and Della Rocca are, I believe he offered an essentially similar interpretation in *Spinoza I*, 312–13. Nadler treats Garrett's interpretation as one of two main alternatives, but does not commit to either one in *Spinoza's 'Ethics'*, 87–98.

[120] In 1991, Garrett wrote:

> In fact, the total infinite series of finite modes *might well turn out to be* identical with the 'whole of nature…' that Spinoza describes in lemma 7s…and which he seems, in Letter 64, to identify as a mediate infinite mode. [Garrett "Necessitarianism 1991," 198 or "Necessitarianism 2018," 104–5, my emphasis]

In the postscript to his 1991 article, added in 2018, Garrett seems less tentative. See Garrett, "Necessitarianism 2018," 128–9. In correspondence Garrett tells me that he would now prefer to say "total system" rather than "totality," since a totality of bodies will not itself be an individual unless they constitute a system of bodies of the kind described in the Physical Excursus.

[121] Garrett, "Necessitarianism 2018," 105 or "Necessitarianism 1991," 198, Garrett's italics.

In our response to Garrett's 1991 article, Greg Walski and I were skeptical.[122] We still wondered how the absolute nature of an attribute could be a logically sufficient condition for the total series of finite modes without its being a logically sufficient condition for each member of that series? Garrett replied that if we assume it can't be, we commit the fallacy of division, the fallacy of supposing that the properties of a whole must be properties of each of its parts.[123] This would be like thinking that because the United States is a prosperous country, each of its states must be a prosperous country. Important motivations for this interpretation are that it does not require any qualification of the principle of sufficient reason—on this view there is a sufficient reason, not only for each particular finite mode, but also for their totality—and it entails that Spinoza was a very strict necessitarian, who held, not only that every feature of the world at any given time is necessary, given its prior history, but that the whole world is *absolutely* necessary.

Now I've lost contact with Greg Walski, so I can only speak for myself here. But I don't agree that our question arose from fallacious reasoning. Suppose we conceive the infinite individual in the way Garrett proposes, as a totality which has, in addition to its three spatial dimensions, a temporal dimension which incorporates the entire past history of the world and the entire history yet to come. (I see no evidence in E2 lemma 7s that Spinoza thought of the infinite individual in this way, but let's waive that objection.) And suppose we further conceive of a complete description of that individual. Our finite intellects can't possibly construct such a description, but we can at least understand what kinds of statements it would have to contain and how it would be related to the attribute of extension. It would have to follow, via the laws of motion and rest, from the absolute nature of that attribute. And it would have to contain an infinite conjunction of statements describing the various finite modes of extension and their relations. Among them will be such statements as: body *a* is in such and such a position at time *t*, moving with such and such a motion; at time *t+1*, *a* collides with body *b*, which is at rest; and so on. If the description of the infinite individual would include statements like that, then it really is a simple matter of logic to infer the existence of bodies *a* and *b* from that description. There's no fallacy involved in inferring the truth of a conjunct from the truth of a conjunction containing it.

I suggest that we need to think differently about the *facies totius universi*. The first thing to note is that the antecedent of the relative pronoun in that sentence in Ep 64 is *facies*, not *universi*. It's the *facies* of the universe which Spinoza says remains the same in spite of the variations occurring within it.[124] This is an

[122] Curly and Walski, "Necessitarianism Reconsidered," 253.
[123] Garrett, "Necessitarianism 2018," 129 and 146.
[124] This is not obvious in English, but in Latin it is: *facies* and *quae* are both feminine; *universi* is neuter.

argument against any interpretation of this language like Garrett's, which makes the mediate infinite mode of extension the whole system of bodies, not its *facies*.

Second, we need to explore the possibility of finding a more helpful translation of *facies*. If you consult a good dictionary of classical Latin, you'll find that it can have quite a wide range of related meanings: "face," "visage," or "countenance," of course; but also "make," "form," or "figure." If you consult Spinoza's own usage, you'll find that when *facies* occurs in C II, as it often does, sometimes "face" is the obviously right translation.[125] But sometimes it's clearly better to render it "form."[126]

That "form" is a good candidate for translating *facies* in Letter 64 seems to me clearly indicated by a careful reading of the concluding portions of the Physical Excursus, where lemma 4, for example, states a condition under which a composite body which undergoes changes in its component bodies will "retain its nature [*natura*] as before…without any change of its form [*forma*]" [E2 lemma 4 (O IV 184/G II 100/C I 461)]. The language is similar in each of the remaining lemmas and in the scholium to lemma 7. Spinoza's problem in this whole passage is to explain how a composite individual can retain its form (or nature) in spite of the changes which occur in its components, either by replacement of the components or changes in the components, or by changes in the motion or rest of the individual as a whole. It retains its form because of the laws of motion which preserve a constant relation between the parts.

Suppose we grant that "the form of the whole universe" is not just a good candidate for translating *facies totius universi*, but in fact the best choice. What, so far as we can tell, does Spinoza think the form of the whole universe actually is? One constraint on our answer is that it must be something we can plausibly think of as immutable. After all, the infinite modes, whether immediate or mediate, are supposed to follow from the absolute nature of their attribute, in this case, the attribute of extension. But God's attributes are immutable. So it seems that anything which follows from their absolute nature ought to be immutable.[127] The infinite individual does not satisfy that requirement.

[125] Notably where Spinoza is describing Moses' relationship to God, with whom Moses is supposed to have spoken *de facie ad faciem*.

[126] For example, in *TP* 6.2, Spinoza writes:

> …when disagreements and rebellions are stirred up in a commonwealth—as they often are—the result is never that the citizens dissolve the commonwealth—though this often happens in other kinds of society. Instead, if they can't settle their disagreements while preserving the form [*facies*] of the commonwealth, they change its form [*forma*] to another. So when I speak of the means required to preserve the state, I understand the means necessary to preserve its form [*forma*] without any notable change. [*TP* 6.2 (O V 140/G III 297/C II 532)]

Here *facies* and *forma* are treated as interchangeable. A similar usage occurs in *TP* 7.25, where Spinoza writes: "The form [*facies*] of the state should be kept one and the same. So there should be one King, [always] of the same sex, and the sovereignty ought to be indivisible" [*TP* 7.25 (O V 182/G III 318/C II 556)].

[127] Spinoza does not *say* in E1p21–3 that the infinite modes are immutable; but he had said this in *KV* I.9 (O I 250/G I 48/C I 92). So it's not just a reasonable inference from their following from something immutable.

When I first advanced this theory, I did not offer much evidence for it. (See *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 1969, 61.) In my mind at the time it was simply a reasonable inference from two facts: first, that Spinoza's embrace of the ideal of a unified science would lead him to believe in the existence of such laws, even if it was beyond his (or anyone's) ability at that time to identify them and organize them into a deductive system; and second, that his commitment to a realist theory of truth would lead him to believe that if these laws were true, that must be in virtue of some feature of reality which they correctly described. So his ontology would have to make room for those features. What else could they be but infinite modes?

This still seems to me a plausible argument, strengthened considerably by the arguments advanced in this chapter. But there's one further consideration. The usual view about the mediate infinite mode of extension has been that there's exactly one such infinite mode. After all, Spinoza mentions only one. As I presented my view in the preceding paragraph, I suggested you might regard "*facies totius universi*" as a collective phrase referring to all the truthmakers for lower-level laws. That would appear to preserve—nominally at least—the view that there's only one mediate infinite mode of extension. But arguably each of those truthmakers must itself be regarded as a mediate infinite mode, since it will be an infinite and eternal entity, following from the absolute nature of extension by way of the immediate infinite mode. So my view really entails that there must be a great many mediate infinite modes. Infinitely many, I would think.

Now I'm in fact quite happy to accept this consequence. I've thought for a long time that the grounds for holding that there is exactly one mediate infinite mode for any given attribute were pretty slender. And recently I've found support for this line of thought in an unexpected quarter. In his *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, Melamed has drawn precisely that conclusion: that there must be infinitely many mediate infinite modes for any given attribute. Obviously he would not argue for it because he accepts my view that the infinite modes are truthmakers for the laws of nature. He rejects that view rather brusquely.[128] His argument is, instead, a straightforward inference from E1p36 and E1p22. The first of these propositions says that "Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow." The second says, essentially, that whatever follows from an infinite mode must itself be an infinite mode. Melamed has no difficulty showing that these two propositions generate "an infinite chain of infinite modes in every single attribute."[129] So his work provides an independent argument for a surprising consequence of my interpretation (and against the idea that the infinite individual is *the* mediate mode of extension). How pleasing to find something that he and I agree about!

[128] Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 113.

[129] Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 120.

4. Concluding Theological Postscript

In this chapter I've tried to provide strong textual support for the proposition that the laws of nature are central to Spinoza's system, and that understanding their role in that system enables us to provide good answers to difficult, but important questions about Spinoza's metaphysics. I think I've generally succeeded. But there is one line of objection I still need to address.

My Spinoza, some will think, is a pretty secular philosopher. He has a view of what there is, of what kinds of thing there are, and how they're related to one another, which does not require belief in any supernatural beings or actions. So some might take my account to support the view that Spinoza was an atheist. His metaphysics seems not to encourage the acts and feelings we normally think of as religious. But, the objection may go, Spinoza is, in fact, a profoundly religious philosopher, who not only calls his first cause 'God,' but also counts the knowledge and love of God as man's highest good. Novalis had reason to call him a 'God-intoxicated man'. If Spinoza's God is just the fundamental laws of the universe, how can we account for his religiosity? How can you love and revere an impersonal system of laws? And if you can't love and revere Spinoza's God, how is it proper to call him God? I don't recall seeing anyone object to my interpretation in quite these terms. But I suspect this line of thought may explain why some find my interpretation astonishing.

Let's approach this question by considering the late Steven Weinberg's criticism of one of Spinoza's most prominent admirers, Albert Einstein.[130] In 1929, Einstein received a book from a secularist in Germany, Eduard Büsching, titled *Es gibt keinen Gott*. Einstein replied that Büsching's book should have been titled *Es gibt keinen persönlichen Gott*, because it dealt only with the notion of a personal God and not with impersonal conceptions like Spinoza's. He then declared himself a Spinozist:

> We followers of Spinoza see our God in the wonderful order and lawfulness of all that exists, and in its soul, as it reveals itself in man and animal.

In the same year, writing to a rabbi who had asked whether he believed in God, Einstein replied:

> I believe in Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, not in a God who concerns himself with the fates and actions of human beings.

I cite these remarks, not to add another precursor to my list, but because they raise an important question: whether, if an interpretation along my lines is

[130] For the quotations cited here see Max Jammer's *Einstein*, 43–58.

correct, it is not seriously misleading, even perhaps dishonest, to call Spinoza a believer in God. In *Dreams of a Final Theory* Weinberg criticized Einstein and others who have expressed similar views for abusing the language in using the term "God" to refer to the order of the universe:

> If words are to have any value to us, we ought to respect the way that they have been used historically, and we ought especially to preserve distinctions that prevent the meanings of words from merging with the meanings of other words. In this spirit, it seems to me that if the word "God" is to be of any use, it should be taken to mean an interested God, a creator and lawgiver who has established, not only the laws of nature and the universe, but also standards of good and evil, some personality that is concerned with our actions, something in short that it is appropriate for us to worship.[131]

Then, after citing the second of the above quotes from Einstein, Weinberg goes on to ask:

> What possible difference does it make to anyone if we use the word "God" in place of "order" or "harmony," except perhaps to avoid the accusation of having no God? (Weinberg, *Dreams*, 244–5)

Now I have some sympathy with Weinberg's views about language. But I think this is unfair to Einstein, and by implication to Spinoza. It's true, of course, that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, in their popular forms, typically conceive of their God as an 'interested' God, in Weinberg's sense: a personal creator of the universe, a promulgator of laws intended to regulate our conduct, a being who will reward us for obeying and punish us for violating those laws, a being concerned about our well-being, a comfort in times of trouble, a being who has given us great gifts, whose goodness to us we ought to reciprocate with love and obedience. That is not Spinoza's God.

But the historical use of the term "God" is more complex than Weinberg's critique acknowledges. In the Abrahamic religions one central element in the concept of God has always been that God's existence and actions provide the ultimate explanation of the universe. When the Abrahamites encountered Greek culture, they found that its philosophers also often believed in a first cause of the universe, which they called God, but which they conceived very differently than the Abrahamites did. In his *Metaphysics* Aristotle argued that there must be a first mover, which moves without being moved, which is the ultimate cause of the world, and which may properly be called God. But Aristotle's God was not an 'interested' God. It was an eternal thinking thing, but one which thinks only of itself. It has no concern for, or knowledge of, particular human beings and their

[131] Weinberg, *Dreams*, 244–5.

vicissitudes. Aristotle recognized that the popular religion of his day was different from the austere religion he proposed (*Metaphysics* XII, 8, 1074b1–13). But he claimed that his religion agreed with the popular on a fundamental truth about the causation of the world, and that the anthropomorphism of the popular religious tradition merely formulated that truth in a way designed to persuade the multitude. Spinoza disagreed with Aristotle in many ways, but in this respect he was very Aristotelian.

Is Spinoza's 'God' something it would be appropriate for us to worship? In the end, I think, he would want to say "yes." But only after making two stipulations. First, he would argue that much of what we ordinarily dignify with the term "worship" has an inappropriate object—a man, like a religious leader, or a natural object, like the sun or the moon, or something man has created, like a statue or a sacred book—reverence for which can only be justified by beliefs which are superstitions founded in ignorance.[132] Second, if we conceive worship as Weinberg does (and as much of the tradition does), it is fundamentally a transactional relationship, involving two personal agents, each of whom offers the other something the other values, in the expectation of getting something from the other which he values. But if God is a supremely perfect being, as Spinoza would argue (in agreement with the tradition), there cannot be anything for the sake of which he acts.[133] Hence the *TTP* formulates a revised conception of worship which does not assume the possibility of reciprocity between God and man:

> The fundamental principles aimed at by the whole of Scripture…must tend to this point: that there is a supreme being, who loves justice and loving-kindness, and whom everyone, if he is to be saved, is bound to obey and to worship by practicing justice and loving-kindness toward his neighbor. (*TTP* xiv, 24; O III 474/G III177/C II 268)

We worship God best by being just and loving toward our neighbor. And God, in his fashion, will save those who practice these virtues. We may not be able to say, strictly speaking, that God loves anyone (or anything), because 'he' is incapable of that transition to a greater state of perfection that joy and love involve [E5 p17c (O IV 470/G II 291–2/C I 604)]. But we can say what reality justifies our metaphorically attributing this affect to God: the person who consistently practices justice and loving-kindness toward her neighbor will find that in the long run the laws of nature favor such virtue.

[132] To see this, survey the index entries for *adorare* and *cultus* in *CWS* II, 666, and 674.

[133] On Spinoza's acceptance of the idea of God as a supremely perfect being, see Letter 2. On the implications of this idea for the doctrine that God acts for the sake of an end, see E1app, *CWS* I, 442–3 (G II/80/22–9) It also, I suggest, underlies his doctrine that someone who loves God cannot desire that God should love him in return (E VP19).

Spinoza is quite ambivalent about worship. He is much less ambivalent about the related notion of devotion, which recent work on his philosophy of religion has called to our attention.[134] In the *Ethics* Spinoza defines "devotion" as "love of one whom we wonder at."[135] He had previously assumed this definition in *TTP* xvii, 90, where he commented on the value to the Jewish people of the ceremonies they engaged in:

> I don't think anything more effective can be devised for steering people's hearts in a certain direction. Nothing wins hearts more than the joy which arises from devotion, i.e., from love and wonder together. (O III 572/G III 216–17/C II 316)

And in general his statements about devotion to God seem quite positive. For example, in *TTP* xii, 13, he writes that "Scripture is sacred and its statements divine just so long as it moves men to devotion toward God" (O III 434/G III 160.C II 251). He does not always treat devotion positively.[136] But the fact that he generally seems to conceive God as a proper object of devotion would argue in favor of regarding his theology as a genuine religious option, not mere verbal sleight of hand.

Still, does it make sense to talk about loving, and being devoted to, an impersonal system of laws? I think it does, and that a physicist like Weinberg, who believed in, and was excited by, the possibility of a final theory, ought to have been more sympathetic than he was to the idea of Spinoza's first cause as an object of love and devotion. The final theory, in his sense of that term, would be a theory which proposed a complete, consistent, and unified explanation of nature, in which the explanations of all the particular sciences could be traced back to a common starting point, which scientists would find so simple and inevitable that they would not feel the need for, or see the possibility of, any more fundamental explanation. They would find the simplicity and inevitability of the starting point, and the unification achieved by deducing the rest of science from it, beautiful, and its contemplation a source of joy. Even, I think, of wonder or awe.[137]

If I'm right about Spinoza, this was the kind of theory he thought we could achieve, and he responded to the idea of it, to the possibility of developing it, with both joy and wonder. Of course, he was wrong to think that the final theory

[134] I'm indebted here to Susan James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion and Politics*, and Clare Carlisle, *Spinoza's Religion*.

[135] E3 Def. Aff. 10 (O IV 324/G II 533/C I 533). See also E3 p52s (O IV 306/G II 181/C I 524).

[136] In *TTP* xvii, 80, he writes that "no hatred can be greater or more stubborn than one born of great devotion *or* piety, and believed to be pious" (O III 568/G III 215/C II 314).

[137] Though I reject Bennett's assumption that Spinoza was a pantheist, I think he was absolutely right to insist that Spinoza was awed by "the extent, grandeur, complexity, and ultimate orderliness" of the universe, and that this explains his thinking that nature is not only the best subject for the metaphysical descriptions traditionally applied to God, but also the best object of the attitudes the Judeo-Christian tradition adopted toward God.

would take the shape he imagined it would. Three centuries of subsequent work in physics have shown as that the world is more complicated and remote from our ordinary experience than he realized. And I think that before his death he came to understand that things were not as simple as he had imagined. But whatever the details of the final theory might be, if it has the general characteristics Weinberg thought it would have, then it might produce joy in those who understood it, to think that the world has the kind of structure it does, and wonder, to think that we are capable of understanding the world.

The consequences of the order we find in nature—floods, hurricanes, droughts, forest fires, to mention only a few things in the news lately—are not always welcome. But it is not hard to understand how, in spite of these consequences, someone could experience joy in contemplating the order of nature. Aubrey tells an anecdote about Hobbes which illustrates this nicely:

> He was 40 years old before he looked on geometry, which happened accidentally. Being in a gentleman's library, Euclid's *Elements* lay open, and 'twas the 47th Prop. of Book I [the Pythagorean theorem]. He read the proposition. "By G--," said he (he would now and then swear by way of emphasis), "this is impossible!" So he read the demonstration of it, which referred him back to such a proposition, which proposition he read. That referred him back to another, which he also read. And so on, until he was demonstratively convinced of that truth. This made him in love with geometry.[138]

That is geometry, of course. But suppose you thought that physics could be organized into a similar deductive system, in which we could rigorously deduce many astonishing truths about complex objects from a few evident truths about very simple objects. And suppose you thought further that some genius had already made a promising start on developing such a system, which other talented scientists were busy developing, and that the results of observation generally confirmed the deductions made by pure reason. This might well make you in love with physics. What's more, it might well excite in you a feeling of wonder: first, that physics should be susceptible of such organization; second, that some of us should have the ability to discover this system of truths; and finally, that others, who may not be great discoverers ourselves, should at least be able to understand what the giants have done. Aubrey says Hobbes's discovery of geometry made him love it; he does not explicitly mention wonder. But "By God, this is impossible" expresses his astonishment very nicely.[139]

[138] See Aubrey's "Life of Hobbes," in *Brief Lives*.

[139] For comments on earlier versions of this chapter I'm indebted to Dan Garber, Minna Koivuniemi, and Steve Nadler.

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7

'Divine Law' in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

Theo Verbeek

Although easily eclipsed by chapters dealing with topics of seemingly greater interest, like the reality of miracles (chapter 6), the interpretation of Scripture (chapter 7), the foundations of the state (chapter 16), and the freedom of thought and speech (chapter 20), chapter 4 of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (*TTP*), on 'Divine Law,' actually provides the connection between most of the problems discussed in the *TTP*. Moreover, Spinoza makes two points that directly relate to the *Ethics*, thus establishing a link between the two works. The first is that the notion of a God-Lawgiver contains a logical contradiction; the second, paradoxically, that there is a 'divine law.' Before studying 'divine law,' its relation to the *Ethics*, and its role in the *TTP*, I briefly discuss the first point.[1]

1. Divine Law without Divine Lawgiver?

The way Spinoza introduces the question of 'divine law' is puzzling: "a law being only a way of life [*ratio vivendi*] people prescribe to each other for some end, it seems we must divide law into human law and divine law" [*TTP* 4 (G III 59/C II 127)].[2] Actually, this is not evident, if only because, when the law is *only* a rule humans prescribe to humans, one does not expect the question of a divine law, that is, a law *prescribed by God*, to arise at all. For a better understanding we must turn to seventeenth-century law theories, like Hugo Grotius' (1583–1645), which provides a polemical backdrop to much of the *Tractatus politicus* (*TP*) and the *TTP*.[3] Grotius makes a distinction between *natural law*, which imposes moral obligations independently of anybody's will, and *voluntary law*, which expresses someone's will and is obeyed out of respect for its author.[4] Voluntary law in turn can be

[1] For a fuller treatment see my *Exploring 'the Will of God'*; "La liberté de philosopher."

[2] All translations are mine. However, for the reader's convenience, references to Curley's English translation are provided.

[3] See my "Natural Rights" and "Aristocratic and Democratic Government."

[4] Ultimately of course 'natural laws' are, according to Grotius, also willed by God but in such a way that once they are embedded in nature they can no longer be changed, not even by God (no more than he could change 2 + 2 = 4).

distinguished in human voluntary law (civil law, the law of nations) and divine voluntary law (universal laws, like the law against incest, but also national laws, like those of the Jewish people). However, a voluntary law is neither natural nor can it be known by reason and as a result it must be promulgated before it can be obeyed or disobeyed. Human voluntary laws are promulgated in decrees, treaties, and charters, whereas, according to Grotius and all Christian theologians, divine voluntary law is promulgated in Holy Scripture. In sum, what human voluntary law and divine voluntary law have in common and what radically distinguishes them from natural law is that they embody a free will, that people obey them because they respect or fear the subject of that will (God, the sovereign), and that before being obeyed they must be promulgated.[5]

Spinoza's argument seems to be molded on this or a similar theory, except that he can't admit the possibility of there being a free will (whether on the level of finite individuals or on that of God) but at the same time can't be too explicit about that. Hence the tortuous and confusing way in which the argument is presented: ultimately all laws must be shown to be rules prescribed by humans to other humans, but given the fact that 'divine law' is part of seventeenth-century theory of law that notion must be dealt with first, if only because both natural laws and even voluntary laws are alleged to have ultimately a 'divine' origin, in so far as the legislator is a sovereign 'by divine right.' As a result, the main question discussed by Spinoza in this chapter is whether God can actually be conceived as "a legislator or a prince giving laws" [*TTP* 4 (G III 62/C II 130)]—a question raised and discussed, with an apparent lack of logic, *after* a discussion of 'divine law.' Moreover, a definitive answer is not given until chapter 19, where Spinoza declares: "We have shown [in chapter 4] that all of God's decrees involve eternal truth and necessity, *and that God cannot be conceived as a prince or a legislator imposing laws on mankind*" [*TTP* 19 (G III 231/C II 336)].[6] As a result, according to chapter 19 the answer to the question raised in chapter 4 is negative ("God cannot be conceived as a legislator"), the reason being, still according to chapter 19, that "God's decrees involve eternal truth and necessity." Finally, by deducing from the idea that "God's decrees involve eternal truth and necessity" that God cannot be a lawgiver and that, as a result, "religion […] obtains force of command only through the decrees of a sovereign" [*TTP* 19 (G III 231/C II 236)], Spinoza links the *TTP* with the *Ethics*, where that argument figures prominently, Granted, therefore, that Spinoza provides several keys to unlock the secret, it is also clear that he does not want to be too explicit.

It is not difficult to understand Spinoza's discretion. Although the *Dutch Confession* [outside the Netherlands better known as the Belgic Confession], and in its trail all Dutch reformed theologians, severely qualified the possibility of atheism by stating, on the authority of St Paul, that every human being has

[5] Grotius, *De iure* I, i, §§13–15, 40/*The Rights* I, 162–6.

[6] My italics.

enough knowledge of God to be 'without excuse', theologians detected atheism virtually everywhere.[7] Gysbertus Voetius (1589–1676), for example, devotes many pages of his *Disputation on atheism* (1639) to the question whether theoretical atheism is possible—a question he tends to answer negatively. According to him there is in every human an awareness of God in so far as he or she has in any case a moral conscience, that is, an awareness of the natural law, which is the naturally given expression of the will of God. That awareness is, according to him, universal. Even so he believes there are many atheists. These, however, are either 'indirect atheists,' that is, people whose ideas and acts, perhaps unwittingly, undermine religion and faith, or 'practical atheists,' that is, libertines, who act as if there is no God. The most common form of atheism is, according to Voetius, impiety, or the deliberate ignorance of God's will. Ultimately, the origin even of so-called theoretical atheism is practical: if the atheist denies the existence of God or claims that we cannot know whether a God exists, he never arrives at that conclusion by careful reasoning, but invariably has a practical motive: by denying the existence of God he wants to deny the will of God, that is, the moral law (both the so-called natural law and God's 'voluntary law' as revealed in Scripture), *in order to* be free to do what he wants to do.[8] In other words, theoretical atheism ('there is no God') is ultimately the rationalized expression of a perverted will. If, therefore, Spinoza would have denied more explicitly that God has a legislative will, that would make it impossible for him to defend himself against the charge of atheism, especially because he also denies the existence of natural law (in the Grotian sense). Indeed, most theologians would not be impressed by Spinoza's proofs of the existence of God, as long as they were not reassured with respect of his accepting the will and the law of God. For people like Spinoza, that is, philosophers who, despite professing a belief in God, actually undermined religion and morality (in the eyes, that is, of the theologians), Voetius used the label of "subtle atheist," a term invented for Vanini (1585–1619), who until Spinoza was seen as the greatest 'atheist' in modern history.[9]

[7] "We know God, first, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: his eternal power and his divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20. All these things are enough to convict men and to leave them without excuse. Second, he makes himself known to us more openly by his holy and divine word, as much as we need in this life, for his glory and for the salvation of his own" (A. Hulsius, ed., *Dutch confession*, art. 2). "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). The ordinary interpretation was that 'God's power' manifests itself in the existence of the world. His 'Godhead' comprises, according to the annotators of the *Statenvertaling* (1637) (the Dutch version of the Bible ordered by the States General) "the other attributes of God's majesty," like goodness, providence, etc.

[8] Voetius, "De atheismo II–III" (1639) in *Selectarum*, 142–66. Cf. H. M. Barth, *Atheismus und Orthodoxie*; W. Schröder, *Ursprünge*.

[9] This was also the accusation against Descartes; see Verbeek, ed., *La querelle d'Utrecht*.

Let us first deal with Spinoza's argument that God cannot have a legislative will. The only premise mentioned in chapter 19 is that God's decrees "involve eternal truth and necessity." This is a central claim in the *Ethics* (E1p32 and E1p32c1 and c2 [G II 72–3]). Although in chapter 19 Spinoza claims he has shown that to be true in chapter 4, the claim actually argued for in that chapter is that God's will and God's intellect are "one and the same thing [*unum et idem*]," which Spinoza 'demonstrates' by pointing out that the nature of a triangle can be said to be willed by God as well as to be understood by God (*TTP* 4.8 [G III 62–3/C II 131]; cf. E1p32c2). That it follows that God is not a lawgiver is indicated rather than formally demonstrated by means of an interpretation of two biblical examples in the next paragraph. The first—the only one I discuss[10]—concerns the story of Adam:

> If God said that he did not want Adam to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, it would imply a contradiction [*contradictionem implicaret*] if Adam could eat the fruit of that tree—indeed, it would be impossible for him to do so, given the fact that such a divine decree should involve eternal necessity and truth. However, since according to the story in Scripture God prescribed [*praecepisse*] this to Adam and Adam nonetheless ate it, we must necessarily conclude that all God revealed to Adam is the evil that would necessarily follow eating from that tree, but not the necessity of that consequence. As a result, Adam did not see that revelation as an eternal and necessary truth, but as a law, that is, as a ruling which announces profit or damage, not because it is the necessary and natural consequence of the act, but only because it is the pleasure and the authority of a kind of prince. Consequently, that revelation became a law and God a kind of legislator or prince only for Adam and only because he lacked knowledge. [*TTP* 4 (G III 63/C II 131–2)]

What Adam believed to be a 'punishment' was the natural, predictable, and necessary effect of his act. God's 'command,' therefore, was actually a warning—presumably like a family doctor who 'forbids' cigarettes or alcohol. The reason why Adam understood God's words as a command and the effect of his act as a punishment is that he did not understand the causal relation between his act and the consequences of that act. In other words, Adam fatally misinterpreted God's words, because he did not have the necessary knowledge.

[10] The second one concerns the *Decalogue*. The reasoning is the same: the fact that the Israelites did not understand why the rules of the *Decalogue* are a necessary precondition for peace and prosperity made them believe they were laws, that is, decrees of a sovereign God. There is a complication Spinoza silently passes over in so far as in seventeenth-century reformed theology the *Ten Commandments* (apart from the one concerning the Sabbath) were usually seen as an expression of *natural* law as condoned and ultimately willed by God, not of divine *voluntary* law in the Grotian sense.

Although that conclusion matches another theory of the *Ethics*, according to which ignorance about nature causes us to explain a natural event as the intervention of a free agent, the connection with the claim that God's will and God's understanding are identical is far from obvious and must be reconstructed.[11] Spinoza's reasoning seems to be the following: an ordinary lawgiver (1) has in mind a situation which he wants to bring about but is not necessary (it is merely possible); (2) he tries to realize it by promulgating a law, in which he also announces credible sanctions; (3) he has the authority to do so because he has the power to enforce obedience. However, no matter what those sanctions are and how much respected a lawgiver's authority, his subjects will always be free to defy the law and disobey. Consequently, a lawgiver wills a merely possible situation whose realization is mediated by the will of other people. An ordinary lawgiver can think of such a situation because he can *imagine* it. However, God can only think something by *conceiving* it, that is, by thinking it as the necessary result of a necessary cause. As a result, if God really meant he did not will that Adam ate from the tree, it would literally imply a contradiction if Adam actually ate from the tree. In any case, for God to *conceive* a situation that does not actually exist nor ever will actually exist would be the equivalent of conceiving a contradiction, which is impossible.[12] Still, to *imagine* a situation that does not actually exist nor ever will actually exist is not impossible in itself—it is what dreamers, poets, and lawgivers normally do. To imagine, however, presupposes an embodied mind, so would be impossible for God. Consequently, the only way in which God can 'think' a situation that neither exists nor ever will exist, would be indirect, namely by *conceiving* the brain of someone (a poet, a dreamer, a lawgiver) *imagining* a non-existing situation [*TIE* §§52–7 (G II 19–22)]. In sum, if it is assumed that God has no imagination, the notion of a God-Lawgiver contains a logical contradiction.[13] Consequently, there cannot be a 'divine law.' Any use of the term 'law' outside a context of legislation and sovereignty is metaphorical. In the end, all 'laws' are only rules of life humans prescribe to other humans.

2. Divine Law as Rule of Life?

Nonetheless there is, according to *TTP* 4, a 'divine law.' It "regards the highest good [*summum bonum*], that is, the true knowledge and love of God." It would be 'divine,' because 'its end' is God; it would be a 'law' because it indicates the means to attain that end; the means indicated would be the improvement of our intellect, this being "our best part" [*TTP* 4 (G III 59/C II 127–8)]. Apparently, Spinoza

[11] For the interpretation of natural events as free interventions of a superior being, see particularly E1app.

[12] See my "Einbildungskraft."

[13] This seems to be the reasoning in E1p33s2.

tries to avoid a contradiction with his other claim ("God cannot be a lawgiver") by redefining the terms: A law can be 'divine,' not because it is given or imposed by God (as by a legislator or a prince), but because its 'end' is God. Moreover, a law would not necessarily be a command but could also be a rule prescribing the means to an end. Finally, the divine law would not have the form of a 'thou shalt…,' but be conditional, the antecedent being a desire or a motive (like 'if you have a head-ache, you must take an aspirin'). In sum, the 'divine law' would only be a particular rule of life, imposed upon themselves by particular people, its particular 'end' being 'God.' Obviously, most of our lives are guided by means-end rules. Moreover, one could argue that even obedience to an ordinary law ('thou shalt not steal' or 'smoking is forbidden in public places') can be guided by such a rule ('if you want to avoid punishment you must obey the law'). What the 'end' of the rule actually is (the motive on which it depends) becomes clear in a series of arguments.

The first argument uses Cartesian language. All our knowledge and certainty depend on the knowledge of God, "on one hand because without God nothing can be nor be conceived," and on the other because "we can doubt everything as long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God" [*TTP* 4 (G III 59–60/C II 128)]. Consequently, our highest good and our perfection depends on knowledge of God. So the highest good and perfection would be absolute certainty, which in turn can be reached only by means of knowledge of God. Building on that argument, Spinoza presents a second one: given the fact that without God nothing can be nor be conceived, "whatever exists in nature must envelop [*involvere*] and express a concept of God in proportion of its essence and perfection" [*TTP* 4 (G III 60/C II 128)]. Consequently, the more we know natural things, the more we perfect our knowledge of God. Here the end is knowledge of God and the means knowledge of natural things. In what could be a new argument or simply a corollary of the second, Spinoza adds that, "(given the fact that to know an effect through a cause, is nothing but to know a property of that cause) the more we know natural things, the more perfect will be our knowledge of the essence of God (who is the cause of all things)." Consequently, "all our knowledge, that is, our highest good, not only depends on the knowledge of God, but entirely consists in it" [*TTP* 4 (G III 60/C II 128)]. So, again, the highest good is knowledge. The final argument is of a somewhat different nature: a man becomes more perfect according as the thing "he loves more than any other" is more perfect. Consequently, the most perfect will be those who more than anything else love the intellectual knowledge of God, who is "surely the most perfect being." In sum, "our highest good and our beatitude is the love and knowledge of God" [*TTP* 4 (G III 60/C II 128)].

In each of these arguments the 'end' we pursue by adopting 'divine law' is not 'God' but 'perfection' or 'the highest good.' Allegedly, it is by pursuing that end that we discover that it coincides with knowledge and love of God. However, from

Spinoza's point of view the notion of 'perfection' is anything but obvious. To be sure, in the *Ethics* Spinoza eventually changes the meaning of 'perfection' to 'reality' (*realitas*) [E2def6], but that is hardly helpful in this case. It would mean that the most 'real' part of a human being is the intellect and that by improving the intellect a human being becomes more 'real'—statements which are either empty (for as long as a being exists it is as 'real' and therefore as 'perfect' as it can be)[14] or secretly normative (with 'real' in the sense of 'genuine' or 'authentic'). Moreover, the essence of a finite being, usually the *locus* of perfection and perfectibility, is according to Part III of the *Ethics* its *conatus* [E3p6]. There is no reason to assume that the conatus of human beings is the intellect (*intellectus*). And although reason (*ratio*), that is, *discursive* thinking, is undoubtedly subsidiary to the *conatus* of human beings, the transition from reason to intellect, or in other words the transition from an instrumental use of reason to *intuitive* intellectual knowledge is far from clear.[15] A closer analysis of each of Spinoza's arguments does not make things much clearer.

In the first argument Spinoza uses the Cartesian logic of justification. According to Descartes the certainty of all knowledge depends on our knowing the existence of God but of course he never requires a clear and distinct idea of God—it is enough to understand, clearly and distinctly, that given God's omnipotence and perfection, he cannot deceive me.[16] The spin put on it by Spinoza is that the ultimate justification of knowledge consists in reconstructing a thing or an event from its first cause. But apart from the fact that this is no longer a Cartesian argument and that it is not clear at all what exactly a causal reconstruction of a thing or event would look like, nor how it could be achieved, there is no obvious reason either why such a reconstruction would result in an *intellectual* and *intuitive* knowledge of the first cause—the transition from a *discursive* application of the rule of causality to an *intuitive* knowledge of the first cause, or in other words the transition from knowing that a first cause exists to having an intuitive knowledge of that first cause remains unexplained.[17]

The second argument is that some beings "envelop and express" more than others "the concept of God." Even if one discounts the vagueness of the typically Spinozist term "envelop" (*involvere*) and ignores the legitimate question how a thing can "envelop" or "involve" a concept, this means either that to understand a particular class of things we need the concept of God more than to understand

[14] See E1p33s2 (G II 74/C I 436–7) and E1app.

[15] See my "Imagination and Reason."

[16] Descartes, Meditation 4 (AT VII 53/CSMK II 37); cf. Descartes to the Curators of Leiden University, May 4, 1647 (AT V 9/CSMK III 316–17).

[17] See E5p24, according to which "the more we know particular things (*res singulares*), the more we understand (*intelligimus*) God," although this could be qualified in the next proposition, according to which it is "the highest *conatus* of the mind and its highest virtue to understand (*intelligere*) things by the third kind of knowledge" (E5p25)—but why would the mind have its own *conatus* if it is the idea of a particular body (E2p13) and why would understanding things by the third kind of knowledge be 'the highest *conatus*' of the mind? Indeed, how can any *conatus* be 'higher' than another one?

other things or that among the finite modes (men, animals, celestial bodies) some are more 'divine' than others. In both cases the order among finite things would be hierarchical. In any case, the only way to understand Spinoza's claim seems to be that human beings are more 'divine' than others because, unlike other things, they have an intellect, in virtue of which their being "involves and expresses" God's being more than that of others.

The third argument builds on the asymmetric relation between cause and effect known from the Aristotelian theory of science.[18] Spinoza's claim that "to know an effect by its cause is nothing but to know a property of that cause" would go too far according to most Aristotelians, and certainly according to Christian theologians: if the first cause of the world is necessarily a God, that does not mean that the world is a property of God, nor that God necessarily created the world.

In the last argument Spinoza basically claims that the more perfect the thing we love the more perfect we are ourselves. Apart from the fact that, again, it is hard to see how we should interpret 'perfection,' it is not clear why we could love a perfect being only after knowing it 'intellectually.' Of course, it could be argued that the more perfect something is, the less it can be known by imagination or reason and that, since we can hardly love something that we do not know at all, we can love the most perfect being only if we know it intellectually. The fundamental difficulty remains that Spinoza's general principles make it impossible to find some beings more 'perfect' than others given the fact that each and any being is as necessary as all others.[19]

Although each of these arguments create their own difficulties, the general idea seems to be relatively clear. The 'end' for which there is a divine law is individual perfection, which in turn can be achieved only by acquiring intellectual knowledge and love of God. Moreover, what the arguments make clear is that this type of knowledge becomes an object of human desire by reflecting on the imperfection of our ordinary knowledge of the world. This means that even as a rule (in the specific sense of a means-end rule) the Divine law is peculiar. An ordinary rule expresses a relation between an end that is known and specifies the means to achieve it: someone who has a head-ache and wants to get rid of it should take an aspirin—we adopt the rule because we want the end and know that the prescribed means are usually successful. In the case of the divine law we do not know the 'end' and have not experienced the successfulness of the means. One may even

[18] See my "La tradition scolastique."

[19] E1p33s2 (G II 74–5/C I 436–7). One could of course argue that an infinite being is by definition more 'perfect' than a finite being. That seems to be the reasoning in the *Korte verhandeling*: as long as we love the body we are unable to do the good (despite the fact that we know what 'good' means), but it is only by replacing love of the body by love of 'God' that we can become virtuous. This quasi-dualistic solution becomes impossible in the *Ethics*, even though Part V can be read as a courageous attempt to restore it.

wonder whether the divine law really defines a relation of means to an end, given the fact that, according to Spinoza, "the highest precept of the divine law is to love God as the highest good, not out of fear for punishment or love for something else" [*TTP* 4 (G III 60–1/C II 129)]. So, apparently, we should not love God in order to attain an end (greater perfection), even though by loving God we do become more perfect. As a result, the injunction contained in Spinoza's divine law is more like Pascal's wager.[20] Still, whereas Pascal's wager is made attractive by the alleged misery of life, the divine law is invoked to solve an epistemological problem. But divine law is not a law in the ordinary sense either, that is, an obligation. Nobody is obliged to seek true intellectual knowledge and love of God. And although the divine law is said to be "universal […] being deduced from the universal nature of man" [*TTP* 4 (G III 61/C II 129)], it is not even addressed to all, given the fact that "carnal man cannot understand it" [*TTP* 4 (G III 61/C II 129)]. Even so, Spinoza believes it is legitimate to speak of 'divine law' (*lex divina*) and even of 'divine commands' (*iussa Dei*) "because they are prescribed to us [*nobis praescribuntur*] as if by God himself [*quasi ab ipso Deo*] in so far as he exists in our minds" [*TTP* 4 (G III 60/C II 128)]. So the only reason why it is presented as a 'law' would be that it contains a special and personal vocation. But that hardly solves the problem, given the fact that in that case there should be a different divine law for each because, according to chapter 3, "nobody chooses a way of life […] except by special vocation of God, who elected him rather than anybody else […] to choose that way of life" [*TTP* 3 (G III 46/C II 113)]. In sum, Spinoza's divine law seems to lack everything that would turn it into a law or a rule in the ordinary sense.

3. Divine Law and Politics?

What is the role of this 'divine law' in the *TTP*, given the fact that it is neither a law nor a rule? In a brief passage Spinoza suggests that it is politically relevant: "What these means are [the means to improve the intellect], what the rule of life required by that end [true knowledge and love of God] is, how the foundations of the best state follow [*sequantur*], and what the rule of life among men amounts to, all that is the concern of a general ethics" [*TTP* 4.4 (G III 60/C II 128)]. However, the fact that the final explanation is deferred to 'a general ethics,' and not to the present work, suggests that the 'divine law' cannot be that politically relevant. Moreover, that the foundations of the best state *follow* (from, I suppose, true knowledge and love of God) can be true only indirectly in the sense that if we truly know the nature of God we necessarily also realize that he cannot be a

[20] Pascal, *Pensées*, §680.

lawgiver [*TTP* 4 (G III 60–1/G II 128–9)]. Given the fact that there is no natural law (in the Grotian sense) either, that insight would allow us to see the state as a commodity, neither natural nor divine, which, given the fact that it satisfies needs everybody supposedly has, would be, in utilitarian terms, a 'universal' good [*TTP* 16 (G III 190–4/C II 283–8)].[21] However, the advantages of a civil society can be understood, in principle at least, by everybody, even without intellectual knowledge of God. Moreover, the only metaphysics we need to see that God is not a lawgiver is, according to Spinoza, that God has no imagination, which can also be understood without intellectual knowledge and love of God. Finally, human laws are explicitly said to "have a different aim" from divine laws, "except if they are sanctioned [*sancitae*] by revelation" [*TTP* 4 (G III 61/C II 129)]. But, as Spinoza explains on the same page, his own divine law "does not require belief in histories of any kind" [*TTP* 4 (G III 61/C II 129)], whereas "laws sanctioned by revelation" necessarily do. In sum, the sense in which the *Law of Moses*, which typically requires belief in histories, is 'divine' would be that, given the circumstances, it was the best law Israel could have, whereas Spinoza's own 'divine law' would be 'divine' because it is oriented toward knowledge of God.

Not only is Spinoza's 'divine law' irrelevant to political philosophy; one may also doubt the relevance of politics to the project of the 'divine law.' Although, like other humans, the wise man is interested in security and as a result in the state, he will know that some goods "depend on our power alone, that is, on the laws of human nature," like "the control of the passions," whereas others, like "security and health," "depend on external things" and are therefore "goods of fortune" [*TTP* 3 (G III 46–7/C II 113–14)]. Only the first are within our power provided we obey certain rules and laws; the second, depending as they do on factors we cannot control, we must take as they come—among them security, and by implication therefore the state. As a result, the philosopher and the wise man will improve their intellect and control their passions, but take politics like other people take the weather. The philosopher will certainly not be in favor of revolt: "reason advises us to defend the state as much as we can" and "to do what the sovereign orders us to do, even if his orders are absurd" [*TTP* 16 (G III 194/C II 287–8)].[22] For "even if the law requires [the philosopher] to do something contrary to reason, that evil is compensated by the good drawn from civil society as such" [*TP* 3.6 (G III 286/C II 519)]. And although the best societies are those "founded and governed by wise and vigilant men," and not by "people with a primitive mind [*hominibus rudis ingenii*]" [*TTP* 3 (G III 47/C II 114)], it is unlikely that the wisdom of those governors consists in the true knowledge and love of God. Indeed, according to the *Tractatus politicus* all they need is solid institutions and a realistic view of human nature.

[21] See my "Natural Rights" and "Aristocratic and Democratic Government."
[22] Cf. also *TTP* 20.8 (G III 241–2/C II 347); and ADN 33 (G III 263/C II 289n17).

4. Conclusion: No Divine Law at All?

Although Spinoza is aware of the Cartesian use of the term 'law' as 'law of physics' he commonly prefers its more traditional sense as a rule of life people impose on each other in view of an end, namely, security and prosperity. Given the fact that he rejects 'natural law' in the Grotian sense (a naturally given rule we should obey independently of anybody's will) he restricts its use to what Grotius calls 'voluntary law.' However, of the two kinds of voluntary law distinguished by most seventeenth-century law theorists he keeps only voluntary *human* law—indeed, according to him the notion of a God-Lawgiver contains a logical contradiction. Of the two claims on 'divine law' made in *TTP* 4 that is the one most directly relevant to the general argument, because it allows Spinoza to argue that all authority has a human origin; that Scripture has no authority and that the norm for its interpretation should be the sovereign; and, finally, that the only moral *obligations* are those incorporated in the laws of a nation. In sum, he reduces all 'authority' to the relation between a sovereign and a subject. According to *TTP* 4 there is yet a 'divine law,' which however turns out to be the rule of life of the wise man. Apart from the fact that, as far as I know, this is the only time Spinoza refers to that rule of life as a 'law' its role in the *TTP* seems to be primarily to mark off the difference with ordinary laws and ordinary morality. Indeed, it means that, apart from a public morality willed, or sanctioned, articulated and promulgated by the sovereign, there would be an essentially private 'rule of life,' which eventually gives the wise man 'love of God'—a condition described in the other works as 'beatitude,' which in turn would be the condition of habitual virtue. However, Spinoza's 'divine law' almost certainly also serves as a smoke screen—the idea that there is no Divine Law at all, which is his true argument, was simply too dangerous.

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8

Divine Law and the Right Way of Living

From the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* to the *Ethics*

Donald Rutherford

Chapter 4 of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* offers a tantalizing hint about the relation between the *TTP* and a general system of ethics that we know Spinoza to have been at work on from the early 1660s.[1] If we accept that the ultimate end of human action is the knowledge and love of God—a thesis Spinoza defends in *TTP* 4—then it follows, he says, that the means to this end can be called "God's commands, because God himself, insofar as he exists in our mind, prescribes them to us, as it were." Consequently, he continues:

> …the principle of living [*ratio vivendi*] which aims at this end is quite properly called a Divine law. But what these means are, and what principle of living this end requires, and how the foundations of the best republic and the principle of living among men follow from this, these matters all pertain to a universal Ethics. Here I shall proceed to treat only of the divine law in general. [*TTP* 4 (G III 60/C II 128)]

The contents of the *Ethics* support its identification with the "universal Ethics" to which Spinoza refers in the *TTP*. In the appendix to Part 4, Spinoza describes it as concerned with the "right way of living" (*recta vivendi ratio*), and central propositions of that part take up the question of "the foundations of the best republic and the principle of living among men." In addition, the second half of Part 5 is dedicated to an account of the knowledge and love of God as a human being's highest good and the basis of the wise person's blessedness. All of this may lead us to conjecture that the *Ethics* elaborates and realizes a plan anticipated in the *TTP*.[2]

The challenge for this hypothesis is that the *Ethics* is far from clear in its presentation of a coherent ethical theory. Attempts to work from the text to an interpretation of Spinoza's ethics have led in many directions, the sum of which

[1] Nadler, *Spinoza*, 131, 199–202.
[2] For an earlier investigation along these lines, see Curley, "Notes."

has left Spinoza's place in the history of moral philosophy uncertain.[3] The proposal of this chapter is that we can make progress on this problem if we see the *TTP* as providing more than just a hint of the ethical theory Spinoza develops in the *Ethics*. In fact, I will argue, the *TTP* offers a comprehensive framework for understanding Spinoza's ethical theory—a framework that is obscured in the *Ethics*. The basis of the framework is a revisionary theory of natural law, which is equated with the ancients' conception of a "principle of living," or *ratio vivendi*. The key features of the theory are, first, Spinoza's distinction in the *TTP* between two orders of law, human and divine, distinguished by their different ends; and second, his provision of two distinct explanations of the force or practical necessity of law, one of them prescriptive, the other based on the "necessity of nature."

The word 'law' appears infrequently in the *Ethics* and at no time does Spinoza make explicit the framework that he articulates in *TTP* 4. Nevertheless, when we have that framework before us, we can see how many of the details of the *Ethics* fall into place, not least the distinction between a "principle of living among men" and the principle of living that Spinoza identifies with divine law. In the first three sections of this chapter, I reconstruct the framework of law outlined by Spinoza in the *TTP*, emphasizing the distinction between natural and prescriptive law and the treatment of human and divine law within a single model that interprets both kinds of law as expressing means to given ends. In §4, I argue that the *TTP*'s analysis of human law provides a fruitful basis for organizing Spinoza's treatment of moral philosophy in Part 4 of the *Ethics*. Not only can most of Spinoza's substantive claims be brought under the framework of human law presented in *TTP* 4, but that chapter's account of the relation between natural and prescriptive law offers a promising starting point for understanding the status of normative claims within the *Ethics*. §5 extends the reading to divine law as it bears on the conclusion of Part 5 of the *Ethics*.

1. Law in the *TTP*

Spinoza opens *TTP* 4 with a distinction between two notions of law. The word 'law' taken "without qualification," he writes, "means that according to which each individual, or all or some members of the same species, act in one and the same fixed and determinate way" [*TTP* 4 (G III 57/C II 125)]. However, the uniformity of action that is enforced by law can be understood in two ways, as depending either on "a necessity of nature" or on "a human decision" (*ab hominum placito*). Conceived in the first way, a law "follows necessarily from the very nature or definition of a thing." In this sense, a law is the specification of the

[3] See, recently, Nadler, *Think Least*; Sangiacomo, *Supreme Good*; Youpa, *Ethics of Joy*; Kisner, *Human Freedom*; LeBuffe, *Bondage to Freedom*; and the contributions to Kisner and Youpa, eds, *Essays*.

regular way in which a thing acts as determined by its nature. This is Spinoza's explanation of *natural* law, which carries no normative import, as indicated by his example of the universal law by which motion is communicated between bodies in collision. I will call this a type-I law. Conceived in the second way, as depending on a human decision, a law is "one which men prescribe for themselves and others, for the sake of living more safely and agreeably [*ad tutius, & commodius vivendum*], or for some other causes" [*TTP* 4 (G III 57/C II 125)].[4] This second sense of law tracks the idea of a *prescriptive* law, associated with a practical requirement that agents may fail to meet. An example of such a law is the demand that "men should yield, or be compelled to yield, the right they have from nature, and bind themselves to a fixed way of living" [*TTP* 4 (G III 58/C II 126)]. Such a law does not follow necessarily from the nature of the human mind but depends on the decision of a lawgiver, and it is a law that those to whom it is addressed can either obey or disobey. I will call this a type-II law.[5]

Spinoza distinguishes these two notions of law more sharply than most of his contemporaries. Until the seventeenth century, the primary conception of natural law was of a normative principle commanded by reason and God that imposes prudential and moral demands on human action. According to Aquinas, law is "a certain rule and measure of acts in accord with which one is either induced to act or restrained from acting." As a "rule and measure of acts," law is a rational principle, which "orders things to their end" (ST, I-II, q. 90, a. 1).[6] The fundamental form of law is the eternal law by which God directs all actions and movements to their appropriate ends (ST, I-II, q. 93, a. 1). As a result of this law, the natural tendency of all change in created things is toward ends proportioned to their natures.

Aquinas' influential account of natural law is premised on the model of divine government he takes to be operative in creation and the legislative role of reason in relation to the will. Because human beings are rational beings, we participate in God's ordering of nature in a unique way (ST, I-II, q. 91, a. 2). Our actions tend to natural ends and we recognize that we should act as God directs us to act. For us, natural law (*lex naturalis*) is a "dictate" or "command" of reason that guides us to our good and obligates us to pursue it. Thus, in performing actions required by natural law, we act as reason commands and as God commands, insofar as God has created us with a rational nature.[7]

[4] I translate *commodius* as "more agreeably," in contrast to Curley's "more conveniently." I assume that it is part of the end of human law not just to survive but to live comfortably, without significant want or discomfort.

[5] For further discussion of the two types of law, see Rutherford, "Conception of Law."

[6] Quotations from *Summa theologiae* (cited as ST) are based on the translation of Alfred J. Freddoso, available online at https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/summa-translation/TOC.htm).

[7] Aquinas is explicit about the prescriptive form of the dictates of practical reason: "Now commanding is by its essence an act of reason, since, by intimation or declaration, the one who commands orders the one whom he commands to do something, and it is reason's role to order another in the manner of an intimation" (ST, I-II, q. 17, a. 1). Cf. ST, I-II, q. 92, a. 2: "Just as a spoken proposition is

This conceptualization of natural law undergoes a profound transformation in the seventeenth century. Developments in natural philosophy promote the idea of universal causal principles that "govern" the behavior of inanimate things (planets, falling bodies) in a manner analogous to the way natural law regulates human action. Careful thinkers recognized that these were different notions of law that should be distinguished.[8] Inanimate things do not follow or obey natural laws in the way that rational beings obey natural or divine law. How these two notions of lawful action come together in the case of human beings is a central problem of early modern philosophy. Most authors continue to affirm the traditional understanding of moral principles as commands of natural law. But are these commands prescriptions that a human being is free to obey or disobey, or are they commands that we necessarily follow insofar as we act from our nature as rational beings? With respect to law prescribed by God, it must be possible for a human being to obey or disobey a law; on this turns the idea of culpability for sin. In the case of a law that follows from a human being's rational nature, though, we may wonder whether this condition can be upheld. To the extent that one is rational, one conforms to the requirements of law; to the extent that one is not rational, one does not. Whether one conforms or fails to conform to the demands of law appears as much a matter of natural necessity as the elliptical path of a planet around the Sun.[9]

The conceptual landscape sketched in the preceding paragraph is complex, with different philosophers defending competing theories of natural law.[10] I introduce it simply to underline that when Spinoza offers his account of law in *TTP* 4 he is entering an arena in which vigorous debates about the foundations of law and the juridical authority of God, reason, and human lawgivers are occurring. From here on, I limit myself to the ways in which Spinoza's contributions to these debates are original and illuminate the *Ethics*. In particular, I stress that with respect to natural law as historically understood—normative demands of reason on human action—there are grounds for doubting whether such law has a place in Spinoza's theory, which divides all law into natural law that depends on "a necessity of nature" and prescriptive law that depends on "a human decision."[11]

a dictate of reason in the mode of asserting, so too a law is a dictate of reason in the mode of issuing a precept."

[8] Boyle, *Free Enquiry*, §2.

[9] Concerns about culpability become more acute with the rejection of the idea of human nature as ordered to ends that serve as standards for correct action. Under that scheme, there is an agreement between what a human being is disposed to do by nature and what she ought to do. When natural change is associated with determination in accordance with universal causal laws, a gap emerges between these representations of human agency.

[10] See the essays collected in Daston and Stolleis, eds, *Laws of Nature*. For innovations in natural law theory during the early modern period, see Haakonssen, *Natural Law*; Schneewind, *Invention*; Irwin, *Development*.

[11] Although (as we shall see) Spinoza's account of divine law aligns at several points with Aquinas', key doctrines of his metaphysics—his necessitarianism, the denial of divine providence, and the rejection of will and intellect as separate mental faculties—preclude his holding a similar natural law

As Spinoza construes it, a prescriptive law has the logical form of a hypothetical imperative: it is "a principle of living [*ratio vivendi*] man prescribes to himself or to others for some end" [*TTP* 4 (G III 59/C II 127)]. In general, prescriptive laws are end-directed, and as "principles of living" they are implicitly linked to the end of living well, or happily. Here Spinoza advances a creative reworking of Cicero's notion of a *ratio vivendi*.[12] The function of prescriptive law is to impose a rule of living on human beings whose actions do not naturally promote the end of living well, or happily. For the law to have this effect, it is not necessary that the person to whom the law is addressed understand the connection between means and end. All that is required is that the command produce obedience, which it may do through sanctions distinct from the end [*TTP* 4 (G III 59/C II 127)].

Alongside this explanation of prescriptive law, Spinoza introduces a further distinction between divine and human law, based on the different ends to which law prescribes the means. Human law prescribes "a principle of living which serves only to protect life and the republic [*rationem vivendi, quae ad tutandam vitam, & rempublicam tantum inservit*]." Divine law, by contrast, is a law "which aims only at the supreme good, i.e. the true knowledge and love of God" [*TTP* 4 (G III 59/C II 127)]. Integral to Spinoza's theory, then, is a division between two domains of law, human and divine, distinguished by the ends they promote. Both are conceptions of living well, or happiness, but they relate this condition to different representations of life. Human law aims at earthly happiness: an agreeable life, lived in community with other human beings. Divine law aims at more than this: "the excellence of virtue and true blessedness" [*TTP* 2 (G III 41/C II 107)], a state of perfection that transcends the limitations of earthly life.[13]

By Spinoza's admission, the *TTP* is principally a treatment of "the divine law in general" [*TTP* 4 (G III 60/C II 128)]. Throughout the book, however, the discussion of divine law intersects with reflections on human law. Spinoza does not address in detail the relationship between these two domains of law or explain

theory. For contrasting assessments of Spinoza's relation to the natural law tradition, see Garrett, "Natural Lawyer"; Kisner, *Human Freedom*, ch. 6; Jon Miller, "Natural Law"; Steinberg, *Political Psychology*, ch. 2.

[12] As noted by Lærke, *Freedom of Philosophizing*, 47. Lærke cites *De legibus*, I.23, which identifies law (*lex*) with right reason (*recta ratio*). The formula Spinoza adopts more closely tracks Cicero's language in *De finibus*, V.15–16: "Once…one knows the ends of things, once one understands what the ultimate good and evil is, then one finds a path through life and a model of all one's duties, to which each action may be referred. From this one can discover and construct the principle of living happily [*beate vivendi ratio*] that all seek."

[13] Spinoza follows Aquinas in drawing this distinction: "the end of human law is distinct from the end of divine law. For the end of human law is temporal peace within the political community [*temporalis tranquillitas civitatis*], and human law achieves this end by curbing exterior acts that involve evils capable of disturbing the peaceful state of the political community. By contrast, the end of divine law is to lead a man to the end of eternal happiness, and this end is impeded by any sin whatsoever—not just the exterior acts, but the interior acts as well. And so what suffices for the perfection of human law, viz. that it prohibit sins and mete out punishments, does not suffice for the perfection of divine law. Rather, divine law has to make a man totally fit for participation in eternal happiness" (ST, I-II, q. 98, a. 1). A crucial difference is that, for Spinoza, all prescriptive law, including that which is nominally divine law, depends on a human decision.

how from divine law there follow "the foundations of the best republic and the principle of living among men" [*TTP* 4 (G III 60/C II 128)]. Such issues, he suggests, are reserved for a future "universal Ethics." Nevertheless, from the *TTP* itself we can gather considerable information about Spinoza's understanding of human and divine law, and of how the two forms of law connect with the second distinction highlighted in *TTP* 4 between prescriptive and natural law. To this I now turn.

2. Human Law in the *TTP*

Spinoza's account of human law begins matter-of-factly. Law is a necessary feature of any human society. "If nature had so constituted men that they desired nothing except what true reason teaches them to desire," a society could exist without laws, and "it would be completely sufficient to teach men true moral lessons, so that they would do voluntarily, wholeheartedly, and in a manner worthy of a free man, what is really useful" [*TTP* 5 (G III 73/C II 144)]. However, nature has not constituted human beings in this way. They judge what is useful to them "not by the dictate of sound reason," but "from immoderate desire and because they are carried away by affects of mind which take no account of the future and of other things" [*TTP* 5 (G III 73/C II 144)]. Consequently, society cannot exist without a mechanism to limit human beings' ability to act on their natural appetites. This mechanism comes in the form of laws "which moderate and restrain men's immoderate desires and unchecked impulses" [*TTP* 5 (G III 74/C II 144)].

Human laws initially appear as the commands of a lawmaker whose power is sufficient to ensure compliance on the part of his subjects. Such a lawmaker may be an autocrat who possesses enough power to rule as he chooses, or a sovereign body authorized to make and enforce law. Like Hobbes, Spinoza defends the latter as a development that promotes peace and prosperity, requiring individuals to cede their unrestricted right to rule themselves and to accept the right of the state to command them by law [*TTP* 16 (G III 191/C II 284–5)].[14] In either case, we have human law that is prescribed to subjects by an external power that enforces obedience by the threat of punishment and the promise of reward. In principle, the subjects of a well-ordered state should recognize the long-term advantages of adhering to a principle of living that serves "to protect life and the republic." They should see that they thereby advance their own interests by living "more safely and agreeably." Again, though, we encounter the problem that made law necessary in the first place. Human beings do not in general act "by the dictate of sound reason"; they do not act on behalf of their own long-term good or the

[14] On the relation between Hobbes's and Spinoza's views, see Curley, "Durst Not Write."

common good from which they benefit. Hence, if life and the republic are to be protected, subjects must be compelled to act lawfully by the threat of sanctions.

According to Spinoza, those who follow prescribed laws only because they fear being punished render themselves servile, subject to the will of another. He contrasts them with individuals who follow the law because they grasp the relation between end and means: "the person who gives to each his due because he knows the true reason for the laws and their necessity…acts from a constant heart, and by his own decision, not that of another. So he deserves to be called just" [*TTP* 4 (G III 59/C II 127)]. The person who obeys the law because he understands it as a means to an end he desires, e.g. living more safely and agreeably, acts by his own decision. In other words, he prescribes law to himself. This tracks the first disjunct in the elaboration of type-II law as "a principle of living which men prescribe to themselves or to others for some end" [*TTP* 4 (G III 59/C II 127)]. Thus, it seems, we have two ways of acting under the influence of type-II human laws. A subject may obey a law because it has been commanded by an external authority with the power to enforce compliance or she may obey the law because she has prescribed it to herself. For Spinoza, the latter occurs when a subject understands the law as a necessary means to the end of protecting life and the republic, and so acts "according to the guidance of reason alone."[15]

The person who "prescribes law to herself" realizes a kind of independence that the servile person lacks: she acts from her own decision, according to the "dictates of sound reason." It is just here that accounts of the normativity of reason typically enter the picture. When we act according to principles of prudence or morality, we act as we *ought* to act, as commanded by reason. And, because reason is definitive of the nature of a human being, we act autonomously, or by our own will. Insofar as we are rational, we command or prescribe law to ourselves, law that we are "bound" to follow. Thus, reason, autonomy, and right action come together in a tight package that supports the authority of prudence and morality, separate from their prescription by an external lawgiver.[16]

Spinoza's frequent appeal, in the *TTP* and the *Ethics*, to acting from the "dictate of reason" suggests an affinity between his position and natural law theory:

[15] "Really, the person who is drawn by his own pleasure, and can neither see nor do anything useful to himself, is most a slave. The only free person is the one who lives wholeheartedly according to the guidance of reason alone" [*TTP* 16 (G III 194/C II 288)]. Spinoza immediately qualifies this, stating that though obedience to an external command takes away freedom, it does not by itself render someone a slave: "If the end of the action is not the advantage of the agent himself, but of the person who issues the command, then the agent is a slave, useless to himself. But in a Republic, and a state where the supreme law is the well-being of the whole people, not that of the ruler, someone who obeys the supreme power in everything should not be called a slave, useless to himself, but a subject" [*TTP* 16 (G III 194–5/C II 288–9)]. There nevertheless remains a difference between the person who obeys the sovereign's command because he fears the sanctions associated with disobedience and the person who obeys the law because he understands its necessity as a means to the end of living more safely and agreeably. Only the latter "lives wholeheartedly according to the guidance of reason alone."

[16] Kisner argues for this conclusion in *Human Freedom*, 128–32.

he appears to make a place in his ethics for principles of practical reason that command an agent to act prudentially and morally. As we shall see, it is indisputable that Spinoza acknowledges a role for practical rules that an agent prescribes to herself: principles of living that she represents as ways she should act as means to the end of living more securely and agreeably.[17] Nevertheless, on the account I defend, Spinoza does not take *reason* to be the source of normative or prescriptive principles that command an agent's will. The "dictates of reason" are limited to eternal truths representing the necessary relations of means and end, or cause and effect. Understanding the necessary relation between means and end, and desiring the end, the virtuous person endeavors to realize the means. But she does not do so through a command of reason that imposes an obligation on any human being to act in this way.[18]

The crux of Spinoza's thinking on this point can be gleaned from his remarks on natural law in *TTP* 16. He advances as "the supreme law of nature" that "each thing strives to persevere in its state, as far as it can by its own power, and does this, not on account of anything else, but only of itself" [*TTP* 16 (G III 189/C II 282–3)]. Furthermore, given the identity of right and power, it follows "that each individual has a supreme right to do everything it can, or that the right of each thing extends as far as its determinate power does" [*TTP* 16 (G III 189/C II 282)]. This, Spinoza stresses, holds for every individual, human and non-human:

> Nor do we recognize here any difference between men and other individuals in nature, nor between men endowed with reason and those others who are ignorant of true reason, nor between fools and madmen, and those who are sensible and sane. For whatever each thing does according to the laws of its nature, it does with supreme right, because it acts as it has been determined to do according to nature, and cannot do otherwise. [*TTP* 16 (G III 189–90/C II 283)]

Spinoza's "supreme law of nature" is a natural law, as defined in *TTP* 4: the specification of the regular way in which a thing acts as determined by its nature. Assuming the identification of right and power, it follows that no individual *can* act contrary to right: "fish are determined by nature to swimming, and the large ones to eating the smaller. So it is by the supreme right of nature that

[17] I return to this point in §4.

[18] See Rutherford, "Dictates of Reason." Kisner argues that "many" of Spinoza's dictates of reason are "universal prescriptions, applying to all people in all situations" (*Human Freedom*, 112–13). Such dictates, he says, are "natural laws," which are "normative in virtue of our desire to persist in existence and increase our power" (118). Whether there are grounds for treating Spinoza's dictates as normative turns on whether Spinoza associates correctness conditions with an agent's desires. Although it is tempting to say that desires that promote an agent's "true interest" are ones he should act from, Spinoza rejects this claim in cases where an agent lacks the relevant desires. Although it is "more advantageous to him to live according to the dictates of sound reason," "[i]f he doesn't want to do this, he's permitted to act at his own risk. So, he's only bound to live according to his own decision, not anyone else's" [*TTP* 16 (G III 199/C II 293–4)]. Against this, see Kisner, *Human Freedom*, 119–20.

fish are masters of the water, and that the large ones eat the smaller" [*TTP* 16 (G III 189/C II 282)].

With respect to human beings, Spinoza introduces a further level of determination in what he calls the "universal law of human nature":

> [I]t's a universal law of human nature that no one neglects to pursue what he judges to be good, unless he hopes for a greater good, or fears a greater harm.... I say explicitly: the one which *seems* [*videtur*] to the person choosing to be greater or lesser. It does not follow that things must be as he judges them to be. This law is so firmly inscribed in human nature, that it ought to be numbered among the eternal truths, which no one can fail to know. [*TTP* 16 (G III 191–2/C II 285)]

It is a universal law of *human* nature that, in acting, every human being pursues their greatest apparent good. Again, Spinoza presents this as a type-I law that expresses a necessity of nature. It is consistent with this law that the desires of many people lead them to neglect the ends of human law. Prescriptive laws are instituted to channel the desires of such people, so that they tend to those ends. Since prescriptive laws themselves depend on a human decision that reflects a lawgiver's judgment about the good, all human behavior falls under the scope of the universal law of human nature. Both the end of human law and the commanding of prescriptive law are explained by this natural law.

Finally, Spinoza acknowledges that, from their own power, some human beings pursue their true good or advantage. The actions of such individuals are explained by the "laws of human reason, which aim only at man's true advantage and preservation" [*TTP* 16 (*G* III 190–1/C II 284)]. Spinoza equates acting from the laws of human reason with acting from the dictates of reason [*TTP* 16 (G III 191/C II 184)], and he regards individuals who act in this way as promoting the end of human law independently of external commands or prescriptions. Thus, the laws of human reason themselves serve as a *ratio vivendi* sufficient for "protecting life and the republic" [*TTP* 4 (G III 59/C II 127)], and for "living more safely and agreeably" [*TTP* 4 (G III 57/C II 125)].[19]

The point I wish to emphasize is that when individuals act from the laws of human reason they act from a type-I or natural law. Spinoza attaches no notion of correctness or obligation to acting in this way:

> [J]ust as the wise man has the supreme right to do everything which reason dictates, or to live according to the laws of reason, so also the ignorant and weak-willed have the supreme right to do everything appetite urges, or to live

[19] Cf. *TTP* 5: From the "dictates of sound reason," human beings "do voluntarily, wholeheartedly, and in a manner worthy of a free man, what is really useful" (G III 73/C II 144).

> according to the laws of appetite…. The natural right of each man is determined not by sound reason, but by desire and power. For not all men are naturally determined to operate according to the rules and laws of reason…. [Nature] has denied them the actual power to live according to sound reason. So they're no more bound to live according to the laws of a sound mind than a cat is bound to live according to the laws of a lion's nature. [*TTP* 16 (G III 190/C II 283)]

For people who are incapable of following the dictates of reason and instead live by the laws of appetite, there is no requirement that they act other than they do. Their actions do not conform to the laws of reason and there are no grounds for claiming they should. They act as they do by supreme right. Equally, there is nothing about having the nature of a human being that renders it right or obligatory to act from the dictates of reason.[20] Even if one's nature has given one the capacity to act rationally, and on some occasions one does act in this way, it does not follow that one *should* do so. For Spinoza, human minds do not have built-in ends of this sort. They simply act as they are determined to act, in accord with their perception of their apparent good.

Spinoza regards it as an established truth that those who act from the laws of human reason pursue their true advantage. Yet, *pace* Aquinas and other natural law theorists, he does not conceptualize this as involving a responsiveness to a command of reason. The role of reason is strictly cognitive. To act from the dictates of reason is simply to understand, and to be determined in action by the knowledge of eternal truth [*TTP* 4 (G III 64/C II 133)]. The laws of human reason achieve their effect because it is the nature, or intrinsic power, of the mind to act from understanding.[21] In contrast to the "universal law of human nature," however, the laws of human reason do not describe the "fixed and determinate way" that every human mind acts. In general, individuals do not act solely from the mind's own power of acting. Rather, they are "determined to exist and have effects in a definite way" by the necessity of "the eternal order of the whole of nature, of which man is only a small part" [*TTP* 16 (G III 191/C II 284)]. Only the virtuous pursue their "true advantage and preservation" from their own power.

Without attempting to defend the claim in greater detail, I propose that, in the *TTP*, "acting from the dictate of reason" involves the operation of a type-I law:

[20] The only laws that obligate are those commanded by the state: "Justice, then, and all the teachings of true reason, without exception (and hence loving-kindness toward one's neighbor), acquire the force of law and of a command only by the right of the state" [*TTP* 19 (G III 230/G II 334)]. Contrast this with Aquinas: "everything toward which man is inclined in accord with his nature belongs to the law of nature…. [S]ince the rational soul is the proper form of man, every man has a natural inclination toward acting in accord with reason—which is just to act in accord with virtue. Hence, in this sense all the acts of the virtues belong to the natural law, since the faculty of reason proper to each man dictates by nature that he act virtuously" (ST, I-II, q. 94, a. 3).

[21] The connection between acting from the mind's own power and acting from the dictate of reason is more fully developed in the *Ethics*. I return to it in §4.

a law "which depends on a necessity of nature." If this is correct, then the deepest strand in Spinoza's account of human law is that the type-II laws that an individual prescribes to herself, in fact, manifest a type-I law: a law that follows from the nature of reason. When a human being is motivated to act in ways that promote her true advantage, she is not responding to an internal command that she ought to act in this way. She simply acts as she necessarily does, determined by the power that defines the nature of the mind. I take this to be a fundamental lesson of Spinoza's philosophy which is supported by the general account of law advanced in the *TTP*.

3. Divine Law in the *TTP*

The originality of Spinoza's analysis of law is most fully revealed in his discussion of divine law. The discussion spans much of the *TTP* and involves many details that I must leave aside. Here I limit myself to points that extend and substantiate the account of law sketched thus far.[22]

Focusing initially on the Hebrew Bible, Spinoza accepts that Moses' revelation to the Israelites involved the communication of what Moses believed was divine law: God's commandments concerning the right way of living. As communicated by Moses, divine law has the form of a type-II law: a law prescribed to the Israelites as a *ratio bene vivendi*. Yet, while represented as God's command, Moses' teaching does not align with the end of divine law as conceived by Spinoza. Moses commanded the Israelites "to love God and keep his law, that they might acknowledge the goods they had received from God, such as their freedom from bondage in Egypt" [*TTP* 2 (G III 41/C II 107)]. "[H]e terrified them with threats, if they transgressed those commands, and he promised them many goods if they respected them. So he taught them in the same way parents usually do children who are lacking in all reason. Hence, it is certain that they did not know the excellence of virtue and true blessedness" [*TTP* 2 (G III 41/C II 107)].[23]

Spinoza expands on this point in *TTP* 5. "[I]n the five books commonly attributed to Moses, nothing else is promised…than this temporal prosperity [of the state], i.e., honors or reputations, victories, wealth, pleasures and health" [*TTP* 5 (G III 70/C II 139–40)]. Although the Torah contains, "many precepts related to morals," it does "not contain those precepts as moral teachings, universal to all men, but as commands especially accommodated to the grasp and mentality of the Hebrew nation, and so as commands which concern only the advantage of the

[22] On the *TTP*'s account of divine law, see Verbeek, *Exploring*; James, *Philosophy, Religion, Politics*.

[23] Much turns on the meaning of "true blessedness." If a blessed life is a safe and prosperous life enjoyed in community with others, then the Israelites' being chosen by God may be thought sufficient for blessedness. For Spinoza, however, such a life is the end of human law. Blessedness requires at a minimum a mind made virtuous through union with God.

state" [*TTP* 5 (G III 70/C II 140)]. "Moses does not teach the Jews as a teacher or Prophet that they should not kill or steal, but commands these things as a lawgiver and prince.... Similarly, the command not to commit adultery concerns only the advantage of the republic and the state" [*TTP* 5 (G III 70/C II 140)]. If Moses had wanted to convey the prohibitions against killing, theft and adultery as "a moral teaching, which concerns not only the advantage of the republic, but also the peace of mind and true blessedness of each person," Spinoza argues, "he would not condemn only the external action, but also the consent of the mind itself" [*TTP* 5 (G III 70/C II 140)].

The upshot of these reflections is that Moses' teachings, which he presents as divine law and believed to be such, in fact, serve only the temporal end of human law. The commands are directed to a particular people rather than humanity as a whole and they are advanced with the aim of ensuring physical survival and the integrity of the state. They are represented by Moses as God's law, obedience to which is enforced through the threat of divine punishment and the promise of divine reward, both manifested in the earthly circumstances of the Israelites; but, in effect, they are Moses' laws, which he commands as a prince. Hence, they bear all the marks of human law [*TTP* 5 (G III 70/C II 140)].

Spinoza discerns evidence of divine law elsewhere in Hebrew scripture: "Isaiah teaches nothing more clearly than that the divine law, taken without qualification, means that universal law which consists in the true manner of living [*vera vivendi ratione*], but not in ceremonies" [*TTP* 5 (G III 69/C II 139)]. In this text, the focus of the law lies "in the purification of the heart, in the performance (or habitual practice) of virtue (or of good action), and finally, in giving aid to the poor" [*TTP* 5 (G III 69/C II 139)]. As observed in his comments on Moses, it is essential to Spinoza's account of divine law that it is a universal law involving "the consent of the mind" [*TTP* 5 (G III 70/C II 140)]. Consequently, the law is closely associated with the practice of virtue and, if understood as prescriptive law, it must be a law that human beings prescribe to themselves. A purified heart acts virtuously of its own accord, independently of external rewards or punishments.

It is apparent from these passages that the same precept, e.g. one prohibiting murder or enjoining charity, can manifest different forms of law depending on the end to which it is prescribed and the mental state of the person complying with it. If the end of the law is only "the protection of life and the republic," then it is an instance of human law. If the end of the law is not merely "living more safely and agreeably" but "true blessedness," then it is an instance of divine law. On the face of it, human and divine law can be either laws prescribed to subjects who are motivated to obey because of external sanctions or laws that a subject prescribes to herself, with "the consent of the mind." In the case of divine law, however, Spinoza precludes the first possibility by imposing the further condition, which he claims to extract from Scripture, that for any precept to qualify as divine law, it must be associated with the "purification of the heart" and the habitual practice

of virtue. Hence, *pace* Moses, divine law must be a law that a subject gives to herself and to which she mentally consents.

This condition sets the stage for Spinoza's identification of the canonical form of divine law with the "new law" of the Christian Gospels.[24] In contrast to Moses, Jesus was not sent "to preserve the state and to institute laws, but to teach the one universal law" [*TTP* 5 (G III 71/C II 140)]. The new law is given as the command to love God above all things and to love one's neighbor as oneself.[25] For Spinoza, the two halves of the command stand together. Citing Paul (Romans 13:8), he maintains that "obedience to God consists only in the love of your neighbor…he who loves his neighbor in order that he may obey God has fulfilled the Law" [*TTP* 13 (G III 168/C II 258)].[26] At the same time, the import of what is essentially a moral principle—to seek the good of others as one seeks one's own good—is understood against the backdrop of a theology that interprets this as the command of a "supremely just and supremely merciful" God, who is "the unique model of the true life" [*TTP* 13 (G III 171/C II 262)]. Faith in God's justice and loving-kindness reinforces the conviction that obedience to the law renders his subjects deserving of happiness. Thus, they love God as the source of their anticipated blessedness and as an ideal on whom to model their own life. As God loves them and treats them justly, so they too should love all and give to each his due.

On Spinoza's account, the central teaching of the Christian religion is obedience to God: God commands us to adopt "the true way of life" (*veram vivendi rationem*) [*TTP* 13 (G III 171/C II 262)]. Hence, Christian scripture should be read as conveying a type-II prescriptive law. This law is distinguished from the law found in Hebrew scripture on three counts: (i) the law taught by Jesus is universal in scope, applying to all human beings; (ii) it is explicitly linked to the end of blessedness, making it a divine law in Spinoza's sense; (iii) it can only be obeyed through "the consent of the mind," wherein one desires the good of the other as one desires one's own good. Only by acting "from a constant heart, and by his own decision" [*TTP* 4 (G III 59/C II 127)], that is, by cultivating moral virtue, can one hope to achieve blessedness.[27]

[24] Cf. Aquinas: "But there are two kinds of common good. The first is a sensible and earthly good, and it is to this sort of good that the Old Law directly ordered [the people]; hence, in Exodus 3:8–17, at the very initiation of the Old Law, the people are invited into the earthly kingdom of the Canaanites. The second is an intelligible and heavenly good, and it is to this sort of good that the New Law orders [the people]" (ST, I-II, q. 91, a. 5).

[25] Matthew 22:35–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:26–8.

[26] See also *TTP* 14 (G III 174/C II 265).

[27] The New Testament "teaches only moral lessons, and promises the kingdom of heaven in return for adherence to them" [*TTP* 5 (G III 72/C II 142)]. Spinoza illustrates the contrast with the Hebrew Bible in the case of the commandment against adultery: "if [Moses] had wanted to teach this as a moral teaching…he would not condemn only the external action, but also the consent of the mind itself, as Christ did, who taught only universal teachings…. That's why Christ promises a spiritual reward, not, as Moses does, a corporeal one" [*TTP* 5 (G III 70/C II 140)].

To this point, we have before us a conventional position: God commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves; one fulfills the command through the cultivation of moral virtue, principally charity or loving-kindness; and one perfects this virtue through the love of God as the supreme good and just dispenser of blessedness. This is the position supported by the "doctrines of universal faith" laid out in *TTP* 14, which agree in broad outline with the position of ecumenical Christian thinkers of the period.[28] Yet, this is not Spinoza's own understanding of divine law. From the perspective of philosophy, the conception of God presupposed by biblical accounts of divine law is a fiction. In truth, God does not possess the attributes of justice and loving-kindness; he does not literally command human beings to live in one way rather than another; and he cannot serve as a model for the right way of living. These are essential points on which philosophy and religion must be distinguished: "the intellectual knowledge of God, which considers his nature as it is in itself (a nature men cannot imitate by any particular way of life and cannot take as a model for instructing the true way of life), does not in any way pertain to faith or to revealed religion" [*TTP* 13 (G III 171/C II 262)].

As a philosopher, Spinoza rejects a prescriptivist conception of divine law, because it rests on the fiction of God as a lawgiver to and judge of human beings.[29] Yet Spinoza does not infer from this that philosophy ought to abandon the idea of divine law altogether. Instead, he argues for a conception of divine law that aligns it with the true idea of God. As he summarizes his position:

> We conclude [i] that it is only because of the common people's power of understanding and a defect in their knowledge that God is described as a lawgiver or prince, and called just, merciful, etc.; [ii] that God really acts and guides all things only from the necessity of his own nature and perfection; and finally, [iii] that his decrees and volitions are eternal truths, and always involve necessity. [*TTP* 4 (G III 65/C II 134)]

Spinoza interprets divine law as natural law rather than prescriptive law. Recall his explanation of a natural law as one that depends on "a necessity of nature" and that "follows necessarily from the very nature or definition of a thing." As natural law, divine law refers to how "God really acts and guides all things only from the necessity of his own nature and perfection." We may call these acts, as Spinoza does, God's "decrees and volitions," but this does not mean that they are

[28] For a valuable discussion, see Lærke, *Freedom of Philosophizing*, ch. 9.

[29] Such a conception of divine law is ruled out by Spinoza's definition of law in *TTP* 4: "[Law] depends either on a necessity of nature or on a *human* decision…. One which depends on a human decision…is one which men prescribe to themselves and others, for the sake of living more safely and agreeably, or for some other causes" (G III 57/C II 125; emphasis added). See also *TTP* 19 (G III 231/C II 336).

literally the commands of a sovereign will; rather, they are "eternal truths" made true by the necessity with which all things follow from God's nature.[30]

The first step in Spinoza's transformation of divine law, then, is his construal of it as a law that expresses natural necessity as opposed to a command or prescription. The second step addresses the relation of human beings to divine law. From the perspective of philosophy, to follow divine law is simply to act from a true knowledge of God. Spinoza characterizes this as "natural divine law," which "is understood simply by the consideration of human nature" [*TTP* 4 (G III 61/C II 129)]. To say that this law is "prescribed" by the mind, or by the idea of God it contains, means only that it is necessitated by the mind's power of understanding. Thus, natural divine law "depends on a necessity of nature" and "follows necessarily from the very nature or definition of a thing" in two related senses: objectively, it is knowledge *of* God and whatever follows necessarily from God; formally, it is knowledge that follow *from* the mind's nature, or power of acting. In the latter sense, the mind can be said to give itself divine law, but this means only that the knowledge of God and of things that follow necessarily from God is acquired through the mind's power of understanding.[31]

Divine law is distinguished from human law in Spinoza's scheme by being law "which aims only at the supreme good, i.e., the true knowledge and love of God" [*TTP* 4 (G III 59/C II 127)]—an end also described as "blessedness" [G III 60/C II 128]. Theology explains the connection between divine law and the supreme good via the idea of obedience: when one obeys God's command, one is righteous and deserving of reward, which one receives in the form of eternal life, union with God, and blessedness.[32] Again, Spinoza rejects this teaching, but he preserves the connection between divine law and the supreme good. Divine law remains a *ratio vivendi* that supplies the means to blessedness. What must change is our conception of this *ratio*. In a critical passage, Spinoza argues that the means to blessedness can be called "God's commands, because they are prescribed to us, as if by God himself, insofar as he exists in our mind [*jussa Dei vocari possunt, quia quasi ab ipso Deo, quatenus in nostra mente existit, nobis praescribuntur*]"

[30] "For whatever happens, happens by God's will and eternal decree, i.e., as we have now shown, whatever happens, happens according to the laws and rules which involve eternal necessity and truth" [*TTP* 6 (G III 83/C II 155)]. See also *TTP* 3 (G III 46/C II 112–13).

[31] On this basis, Spinoza affirms the Christian teaching that divine law is universally given to human beings: "We have deduced this from human nature in such a way that we must think that [divine law] itself is innate to, and as it were, written in the human mind" [*TTP* 5 (G III 69/C II 138)].

[32] This is a key doctrine of the universal faith required as a condition of piety: "VI: Everyone who obeys God by living in this way is saved; the rest, who live under the control of pleasures, are lost. If men did not firmly believe this, there would be no reason why they should prefer to obey God rather than pleasures" [*TTP* 14 (G III 178/C II 269)]. According to Spinoza, the separation of philosophy and religion turns on the assumption that "we cannot demonstrate by reason whether the foundation of theology—that men are saved by obedience alone—is true or false" [*TTP* 15 (G III 185/C II 278)]. Given this, the faithful can continue to believe, without contradicting any known truth, that obedience to divine law is sufficient for salvation. For reservations about Spinoza's strategy, see Garber, "Should Spinoza."

[*TTP* 4 (G III 60/C II 128, trans. modified)]. The qualifications (*quasi*, *quatenus*) are significant. Strictly speaking, there is no command of law by God. God's "decrees," from which all things necessarily follow, are eternal truths to be understood rather than obeyed. The principle of living that God "commands" is nothing but the knowledge we acquire through the power of understanding we receive from God.

Our supreme good, according to Spinoza, consists in perfecting the intellect through the knowledge of God and the necessary dependence of all things on God. "[S]ince nothing can be or be conceived without God, it is certain that all things in nature involve or express the concept of God, in proportion to their essence and perfection. Hence the more we know of natural things, the greater and more perfect is the knowledge of God we acquire" [*TTP* 4 (G III 60/C 128)].[33] As Spinoza argues in the *Ethics*, the knowledge of God is our greatest good, and from this follows the love of God, the being that a finite mind "loves before all others" [*TTP* 4 (G III 60/C 128)]. Crucially, however, what we love is not God insofar as God is the supreme good and the being most deserving of our esteem. The true idea of God does not represent God as possessing the perfection of goodness. Rather, we love and derive joy from the idea, or knowledge, of God, through which all other things are understood. Thus, "the man who is necessarily the most perfect and who participates most in supreme blessedness is the one who loves above all else the intellectual knowledge of God [*qui Dei…intellectualem cognitionem supra omnia amat*], the most perfect being, and takes the greatest pleasure in that knowledge" [*TTP* 4 (G III 60/C 128)].

The *TTP* supports two general conclusions about Spinoza's interpretation of divine law. First, Spinoza replaces a prescriptivist conception of divine law with an understanding of divine law as natural law, or "a necessity of nature." Second, he construes the mind's relation to this law as one of understanding rather than obedience. God is the greatest object of our knowledge, and as such the source of the mind's greatest perfection, but we do not seek knowledge of God in order to obey him or to be rewarded by him. Knowledge itself is our greatest good and the basis of our blessedness and love of God.[34]

[33] This is helpfully amplified in *TTP* 6: "[S]ince we know that all things are determined and ordained by God, that nature's operations follow from God's essence, indeed, that the laws of nature are God's eternal decrees and volitions, we must conclude absolutely that the better we know natural things—the more clearly we understand how they depend on their first cause, and how they produce effects according to the eternal laws of nature—the better we know God and his will" [*TTP* 6 (G III 85/C II 157)].

[34] The strongest statement of this point appears in ADN 34, attached to the sentence, "No one knows, by nature, that he's bound to obey God" [*TTP* 16, ADN 34 (G III 264/C II 292–3n21)]. Curley summarizes the evidence for attributing the note to Spinoza (C II 60–1). If Spinoza is the source, his meaning cannot be mistaken: "As for natural divine law, whose chief precept we've said is to love God, I've called it a law in the same sense philosophers call laws the common rules of nature, according to which all things happen. For the love of God is not obedience, but a virtue which is necessarily in the man who rightly knows God…. Moreover, we've shown that the divine laws seem to us to be laws, or

Relating these conclusions to those of §2, we find in the *TTP* a consistent framework for understanding the relation of prescriptive and natural law. Spinoza's analyses of human law and divine law move from representations of them as type-II prescriptive laws that depend on a human decision to explanations of them as type-I laws that follow from the mind's power of understanding. To the extent that both kinds of law give priority to an agent's acting from the dictate of reason, they are subject to similar analyses. Indeed, since divine law includes an understanding of God and of everything that follows from God, human law, conceived as natural law or the "laws of human reason," must be part of divine law. Specifically, it is that part of our knowledge of nature which concerns the "principle of living among men."[35] Granting this, the distinction between human law and divine law, based on their different ends, remains central to Spinoza's account. Laws as principles of living grounded in the power of understanding can be either human law, which aims only at the protection of life and the republic, or divine law, which aims at blessedness and true peace of mind. The next two sections trace the presence of these doctrines in the *Ethics*.

4. Human Law in the *Ethics*

Spinoza defines human law as "a principle of living which serves only to protect life and the republic." As a type-II law, human law can be either (i) a law prescribed to a person by others to the end of protecting life and the republic, or (ii) a law prescribed by a person to himself to the same end. On the latter construal, I have argued, human law is grounded in the "laws of human reason," which Spinoza conceives as *natural* law, that is, law which "follows necessarily from the very nature or definition of a thing." In this section I examine how these conceptions of human law figure in Part 4 of the *Ethics*.

4.1 Law Prescribed by Others

E4p37s2 sketches the foundations of Spinoza's political theory. The scholium also supplies evidence of his understanding of the basis of evaluative properties. The argument closely follows that advanced in *TTP* 16. All individuals exist by the "highest right of nature, and consequently everyone, by the highest right of

things instituted, just as long as we do not know their cause. But when this is known, they thereby cease to be laws, and we embrace them not as laws, but as eternal truths."

[35] "This is what we ourselves have shown above, viz. that our understanding and our knowledge depend only on the idea or knowledge of God, arise only from it, and are perfected only by it…. For [natural] knowledge teaches Ethics and true excellence, after we have acquired knowledge of things and tasted the excellence of knowledge" [*TTP* 4 (G III 67–8/C II 136–7)].

nature, does those things that follow from the necessity of his own nature." In particular, "everyone, by the highest right of nature, judges what is good and bad, considers his own advantage according to his own temperament…avenges himself…and strives to preserve what he loves and destroy what he hates" [E4p37s2 (G II 237/C I 566–7)]. It follows that in the state of nature there is no authoritative standard of good and evil: everyone "decides what is good and what is evil by his own temperament, and only insofar as he takes account of his own advantage. He is not bound by any law to submit to anyone except himself" [E4p37s2 (G II 238/C I 567)].

If all human beings "lived according to the guidance of reason," this would be an acceptable situation, for "everyone would possess this right of his…without injury to anyone else." But, in fact, human beings are subject to powerful affects that bring them into conflict, even while they need each other's aid.[36] The result is that in order "to live harmoniously and be of assistance to one another, it is necessary for them to give up their natural right and to make one another confident that they will do nothing which could harm them." Given the inconstancy and contrariness of their affects, this can happen only if authority is vested in a state (*civitas*), "maintained by laws and the power it has of preserving itself." The state "appropriates to itself the right everyone has of avenging himself, and of judging concerning good and evil." Thus, it acquires "the power to prescribe a common rule of life [*communem vivendi rationem praescribendi*], to make laws, and to maintain them—not by reason, which cannot restrain the affects…but by threats" [E4p37s2 (G II 238/C I 567)].[37]

Although the state must enforce law by threats (rational persuasion is insufficient given the nature of most human beings), the "common rule of life" it prescribes is a rational principle: an effective means to the ends of peace and security. Given the inconstancy of their passions, not all subjects recognize the utility of civil laws and conform their behavior to them; for just this reason the laws must be enforced by threats. Nevertheless, as Spinoza argues in *TTP* 4, civil law is the basis of a *ratio vivendi inter homines*. In this, it answers to the first sense of a type-II human law: a law prescribed to human beings by others.

4.2 Law Prescribed to Oneself

At the end of E4p37s2, Spinoza writes: "From this it is clear that just and unjust, sin and merit, are extrinsic notions, not attributes that explain the nature of the Mind."

[36] Cf. E4p35s: "it rarely happens that men live according to the guidance of reason. Instead, their lives are so constituted that they are usually envious and burdensome to each other."

[37] Cf. *TP* 3.3: "in the civil order everyone fears the same things: for everyone, there is one and the same cause of security and principle of living [*ratio vivendi*]" (G III 285/C II 518).

Although this statement is true of notions that depend on the decision of a lawgiver and hence have application only within a state, it does not hold unqualifiedly of the notions *just* and *unjust*, which have a significance outside of their determination by the laws of a state. Elsewhere in the *Ethics* Spinoza presents justice as a virtue, which consists in the mind's acting from the guidance of reason: "men who are governed by reason—i.e., men who, from the guidance of reason, seek their own advantage—want nothing for themselves that they do not desire for other men. Hence, they are just, honest, and honorable [*iustos, fidos atque honestos*]" (E4p18s; cf. E4p37s1).

Spinoza's account of virtue can be related to the second sense of human law: law that a person prescribes to herself. Going back to Aristotle, it has been held that to be virtuous it is not enough merely to act in accord with reason; it is necessary to act *from* reason, or for reason to be the principle of one's action.[38] A standard gloss on what this means is that a rational agent has the capacity to determine herself to act, independently of the influence of external causes. Thus, when an agent acts from reason, she in effect prescribes law to herself. Insofar as "dictates of reason" are effective means of living more safely and agreeably, then, they assume the role of *rationes vivendi* that serve the ends of human law.

Part 4 of the *Ethics* is concerned with articulating a principle of living appropriate to an embodied human existence, enjoyed in community with other human beings. The basis of a virtuous life are dictates of reason that are known to promote one's true interest: the preservation of life, bodily health, and a positive affective state. As Spinoza conceives it, virtue has both self-oriented and other-oriented components (E3p59s). Other-oriented virtues like justice and friendship bear on our achieving harmonious relations with other human beings (E4app15). Self-oriented virtues like courage and moderation bear directly on a person's own well-being. We find the latter illustrated in E4p45s, where Spinoza writes that, "It is the part of a wise man…to refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink." As he goes on to explain, such activities are vital to the

[38] As will become clear, I take this to be Spinoza's position. Does this not, though, raise a problem for Spinoza's representation of the righteous person in the *TTP*—the person who faithfully obeys God's command to practice justice and loving-kindness? In places Spinoza appears to concede this as an alternative basis for virtue: "we cannot know anyone except by his works. Therefore, if a man is rich in these fruits, loving-kindness, gladness, peace, patience, beneficence, goodness, good faith, gentleness, and self-restraint…whether he has been taught only by reason or only by Scripture, he has truly been taught by God and is completely blessed" [*TTP* 5 (G III 80/C II 152)]. Although I cannot address the issue in detail here, two considerations weigh against equating the mental state of the person taught by reason and the person taught only by Scripture. First, in some passages Spinoza limits the latter to "the performance (or habitual practice) of virtuous acts" [*TTP* 5 (G III 69/C II 139)]; "a person fulfills God's law if he practices justice and loving-kindness according to God's command" [*TTP* 19 (G III 229/C II 333)]. Second, even if faithful obedience to divine law produces a virtuous temperament—meaning that such a person is disposed to act and feel as a virtuous person does—the causal basis of that temperament remains distinct from that of the virtuous person as Spinoza characterizes him in the *Ethics* (e.g. E4d8 and 4p23). My thanks to Mogens Lærke for raising this objection.

body, to whose health and vigor they contribute when pursued in moderation. The connection to the *TTP*'s account of human law is underlined in the scholium's conclusion: "this principle of living is the best [*haec vivendi ratio optima est*], and to be commended in every way" [E4p45s (G II 245/C I 572; trans. modified)]. With respect to Part 4 as a whole, Spinoza describes its conclusions as bearing on "the right way of living [*recta vivendi ratio*]" [E4app (G II 266/C I 588)].

What remains unresolved is exactly what Spinoza thinks is going on when a virtuous agent acts from the dictates of reason. One possibility is that the dictates are commands or prescriptions that an agent's power of reason issues to counter imprudent or dishonorable appetites. After sitting too long at one's desk, reason may command: Get up and move! Eat! Go to the theatre! Or, when seething with anger at another's slight, reason may command: Be calm! Respond with love rather than hatred! We know these actions to be effective means to the end of living well in community with others, and so we think of them as ways we *should* act. We will be more likely to achieve what we ultimately desire—a long and happy life—if we obey these commands.

Is this what Spinoza means when he speaks of living according to the guidance of reason? I do not think so. At least it is not what is going on in a virtuous agent who acts from the dictate of reason. Although a virtuous agent is moved to respond as reason "dictates," and feels that this is how she should act, the dictates of reason do not take the form of normative demands binding on any agent. As Spinoza argues in the *TTP*, the dictates of reason are "eternal truths" that relate ends and means, or causes and effects. An agent who has such knowledge will be moved to act in accord with it, but that motivation does not reflect a command of reason.

Some have seen a passage from late in the *Ethics* as counting against this conclusion. In E5p10s, Spinoza discusses how we can guard against being overwhelmed by harmful passions. In the absence of "perfect knowledge of our affects," he argues, the best we can do is "to conceive a correct principle of living, or sure maxims of life [*rectam vivendi rationem seu certa vitae dogmata*], to commit them to memory, and to apply them constantly to the particular cases encountered in life. In this way our imagination will be extensively affected by them, and we shall always have them ready" [E5p10s (G II 287/C I 601)]. The passage underscores the importance of "maxims," related to a "correct principle of living," as commands or prescriptions that an agent can impose on herself, building up resistance to harmful passions and reinforcing new habits of acting.[39]

Although such maxims are modeled on rational principles known to promote a desired end, they do not involve agents acting *from* reason. What Spinoza offers

[39] For reservations about Curley's translation, see Lærke, *Freedom of Philosophizing*, 47–9.

in E5p10s is a method for emulating the person who acts from the dictate of reason, not an explanation of how the dictates function in a virtuous agent:

> [W]e have laid it down as a maxim of life (see 4p46 and p46s) that Hate is to be conquered by Love, or Nobility, not by repaying it with Hate in return. But in order that we may always have this rule of reason ready when it is needed, we ought to think about and meditate frequently on the common wrongs of men, and how they may be warded off best by Nobility. For if we join the image of a wrong to the imagination of this maxim, it will always be ready for us (by 2p18) when a wrong is done to us. [E5p10s (G II 287–8/C I 601–2)]

Spinoza describes a technique for training oneself to act in conformity with reason. As he remarks at the end of the scholium, "he who will observe these [rules] carefully—for they are not difficult—and practice them, will soon be able to direct most of his actions according to the command of reason" [G II 289/C I 603]. By engaging in the imaginative exercise described in the scholium, one becomes more able to act from the "command of reason." On no plausible interpretation of the scholium, however, do we find Spinoza claiming that acting from the dictate of reason consists in the imaginative employment of maxims.[40]

This by itself doesn't rule out that acting from the dictate of reason is a matter of an agent's responding to practical demands issued by reason. Nevertheless, there is little to support this reading in Part 4 of the *Ethics*.[41] Take the example Spinoza begins with in E5p10s: "we have laid it down as a maxim of life (by 4p46 and p46s) that Hate is to be conquered by Love, or Nobility, not by replaying it with Hate in return." Spinoza's acknowledgment that we have "laid down" (*posuimus*) this rule as a "maxim" involving a normative demand suggests that the imagination already has intervened to give the principle a force it would not otherwise have. When we look back to the source of the maxim in E4p46, we find no prescription, just a description of how a person guided by reason *does* act: "He who lives according to the guidance of reason strives, as far as he can, to repay the other's Hate, Anger and Disdain toward him, with Love, or Nobility."[42]

The conclusion to draw is that although there are circumstances in which "prescribing law to oneself" takes the form of raising in the mind ideas with a

[40] Cf. Steinberg, "The maxims cited [in E5p10s] are nothing other than dictates or teachings of reason found in *Ethics* 4…. The dictates of reason are general, simple, memorable teachings" ("Following," 192). The account I give here responds to Steinberg's criticisms of my "Dictates of Reason" by distinguishing more sharply between the dictates of reason and their application as maxims in action. For a different account of the relation between the two, see LeBuffe, *Reason*, 128–31.

[41] See Rutherford, "Dictates of Reason," 499–503. For a detailed response, see LeBuffe, *Reason*, ch. 3.

[42] This is consistent with Spinoza's treatment of the "free man," who "lives by the dictate of reason alone" (E4p67d). The concluding propositions of Part 4 describe "the free man's temperament and manner of living [*ingenio et vivendi ratione*]" (E4p66s) and especially his "strength of character [*fortitudo*]" (E4p73s); they summarize, in other words, how the free person is disposed to act, not how he should act.

prescriptive or imperatival content, this is not what Spinoza most basically means by acting from the dictate of reason. Not only is there little evidence to support this interpretation of the dictates of reason, but were this the correct way to understand them, it would sever the connection between acting virtuously and acting from the dictate of reason. As I will now show, the key to understanding Spinoza's account is to see how, in the virtuous person, acting from the dictate of reason, in fact, manifests the operation of a type-I law. Although talk of "prescribing" and "following" can lead us to think of these principles as type-II laws that depend on a human decision, in the virtuous person they manifest a type-I law that follows necessarily from the nature of the mind.

4.3 Law as Determination by Reason

To prescribe law to oneself is to act from the dictate of reason (*ex rationis dictamine*), or according to the guidance of reason alone (*ex solo rationis ductu*). In an important series of propositions in the middle of Part 4, Spinoza establishes that, in the virtuous person, to act in this way is to be necessitated by one's nature, or to act by a type-I law.

According to Spinoza, there is no basis for an individual's desire to act virtuously except insofar as it follows from the "very essence" of a human being, or "the striving by which each one strives to preserve his being" (E4p21d). For this reason, "the striving to preserve oneself is the first and only foundation of virtue" (E4p22c). Yet not every endeavor that follows from a person's actual essence is virtuous. A person is said to act virtuously only when he does something that can be "perceived through his essence alone," or (in the words of 4d8) "through the laws of his nature alone." And, in the case of the mind, this happens only "insofar as he is determined to do something from the fact that he understands" (E4p23d). Spinoza summarizes this line of reasoning in the demonstration of E4p24:

i. Acting absolutely from virtue is nothing but acting from the laws of our own nature (by E4d8).
ii. But we act only insofar as we understand (by E3p3).
iii. Therefore, acting from virtue is nothing else in us but acting, living, and preserving one's being by the guidance of reason, and doing this (by E4p22c) from the foundation of seeking one's own advantage.

The first premise identifies "acting absolutely from virtue" with acting by a type-I law, as affirmed in the definition of virtue (E4d8). The second premise identifies the acts in question with acts of understanding. As the conclusion makes clear, these include acting by the guidance of reason, for "the essence of reason is nothing but our mind, insofar as it understands clearly and distinctly" (E4p26d).

Such acts express the inherent power of the mind, by which it acts as an adequate cause (E5p4s). Thus, effects that follow from the mind's acting by the guidance of reason—effects that necessarily promote an individual's advantage—occur in accordance with a type-I law.[43]

Spinoza reaches this conclusion by reasoning within a tight circle of metaphysical truths. Drawing out their implications for his moral psychology and ethics is beyond the scope of this essay. Nonetheless, it is clear that they support a revisionary account of the notion of natural law as it figures in the history of moral philosophy. In the virtuous person, "human law," directed to the end of preserving life and the state, has a foundation in natural law. But this natural law is not a set of commands or directives, issued by God or reason. As Spinoza argues in the *TTP*, natural law expresses patterns of acting grounded in necessities of nature. This is consistent with the position defended in the *Ethics*, which Spinoza elaborates through closer attention to the concept of essence as it applies both to the striving of individuals and the power of acting that defines the scope of human virtue. Both works, therefore, support an understanding of what is traditionally described as "natural law" as a type-I law.

5. Divine Law in the *Ethics*

The locution of "divine law" is all but absent from the *Ethics*.[44] Its one occurrence in E5p41s references the point of view of the vulgar, who "believe they are free to the extent that they are permitted to yield to their lust, and that they give up their right to the extent that they are bound to live according to the rule of divine law [*quatenus ex legis divinae praescripto vivere tenentur*]" [E5p41s (G II 307/C I 615)]. For those who "prefer to govern all their actions according to lust, and to obey fortune rather than themselves," the only divine law that matters are God's commands. Divine law is a source of external constraint, under whose rule they are persuaded to live, "as far as their weakness and lack of character allows," by hope of reward and fear of punishment [E5p41s (G II 307/C I 616)].

In *TTP* 4, Spinoza opposes this conception of divine law to "natural divine law"—a law which is "universal, or common to all men" and can be conceived "as much in a man who lives among others as in a man who lives a solitary life" (G III 61/C II 129). Under this construal, "the highest reward for observing the divine law is the law itself, viz. to know God and to love him from true freedom

[43] "But a man acts entirely from the laws of his own nature when he lives according to the guidance of reason" (E4p35c1). "Acting from reason is nothing but doing those things which follow from the necessity of our nature, considered in itself alone (by 3p3 and d2)" (E4p59s).

[44] James, *Philosophy, Religion, Politics*, 70, notes propositions in the *Ethics* that make indirect appeal to divine law, including E2p49s ("we act only from God's command") and E2p50s ("all things…happen according to the eternal laws and rules of Nature").

and with a whole and constant heart, whereas the penalty for not observing it is the privation of these things and bondage to the flesh, or an inconstant and vacillating heart" (G III 62/C II 130).

We find the same account defended in the *Ethics*, minus the reference to "divine law." Our "blessedness, or freedom," Spinoza writes, "consists…in a constant and eternal love of God," which arises from the intuitive knowledge of God (E5p36s). We perfect our mind through knowledge of how all things depend on God as their cause:

> [P]erfecting the intellect is nothing but understanding God, his attributes, and his actions, which follow from the necessity of his nature. So the ultimate end of the man who is led by reason, that is, his highest desire, which he strives to moderate all the others, is that by which he is led conceive adequately both himself and all things which can fall under his understanding. [E4app4]

When the mind attains the knowledge of God and enjoys the divine love and blessedness that depend on it, "it has the power of restraining lusts" (E5p42d). By contrast, the person who lacks this knowledge is "troubled in many ways by external causes, and unable ever to possess true peace of mind" (E5p42s).

Spinoza's omission of any mention of divine law in the culmination of the *Ethics* raises the question whether the parallel with the *TTP* is as strong as I have urged. In my view, Spinoza's decision to conclude the *Ethics* with an account of blessedness seals the connection between the two texts. Beyond the end of living more safely and agreeably in community with other human beings, there is the "the ultimate end of the man who is led by reason," namely, the knowledge and love of God. Accepting this, one might still dispute the value of emphasizing the *TTP*'s treatment of law as a backdrop to the *Ethics*. The case for doing so is that the *TTP* brings into relief a structure in Spinoza's ethical theory that may otherwise be overlooked. Regarded as species of type-I law, human law and divine law both identify the lawfulness of action with its following from the necessity of nature.

According to Spinoza, whatever follows from "the very essence, or nature, of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone," is virtue (E4d8). Understood as type-I laws, both human law and divine law exemplify forms of virtue. In the case of human law, this virtue is "strength of character" (*fortitudo*), manifested in self-oriented "tenacity" (*tenacitas*) and other-oriented "nobility" (*generositas*) (E3p59s). Yet Spinoza insists that the mind's "greatest virtue" is "to understand, or know, God" (E4p28d). This, he says in the final proposition of the *Ethics*, is "virtue itself" (*virtus ipsa*)" (E5p42). The *TTP*'s distinction between human and divine law allows us to conceptualize more clearly the relationship between these central claims of the *Ethics*, distinguishing those which bear on the human end of

living more safely and agreeably and those which bear on blessedness, or the knowledge and love of God. In both cases, Spinoza describes "ways of living" that are pursued insofar as the mind acts "by the guidance of reason," "from the laws of its own nature," or "absolutely from virtue"—all of these being equivalent (E4p24d). Nevertheless, there are important differences between the two domains of law, which illuminate the relation of Parts 4 and 5 of the *Ethics*.

As framed in the *Ethics*, the crucial difference between the *TTP*'s two sets of laws and their respective ends is that human law describes the virtue of the mind insofar as it "involves the actual existence of the body" (E3p9s). Under this description, the mind strives to persevere in its being as the idea of an enduring body, which it succeeds in doing insofar as it acts from itself, according to the guidance of reason. One of the key innovations of the *Ethics* is to contrast this description of the mind with a representation of it, "as it is considered without relation to the body's existence."[45] Under this description, the mind, "insofar as it understands, is an eternal mode of thinking, which is determined by another eternal mode of thinking, and this again by another, and so on, to infinity" (E5p40s). When we conceive of the mind in this way, "under a species of eternity" and as it is "contained in God" (E5p29s), we do not represent its activity as directed to the end of bodily survival and the continuation of its own "present existence" (E3p9s). Instead, the mind strives to persevere in its being by understanding alone, which is sought for no other end (E4p26) and whose highest expression is the knowledge and love of God (E5p42s).

Without attempting to say more about the content of the "knowledge of the third kind" that Spinoza makes the basis of blessedness in Part 5 of the *Ethics*, we can observe that he goes further in that work than he does in the *TTP* in conceptualizing the difference between human and divine law, conceived as species of type-I law. Nevertheless, the *TTP* offers much that can inform and deepen our understanding of the ethical theory that Spinoza defends in the *Ethics*. Above all, it allows us to locate that theory relative to a larger space of normative claims that are typically expressed as laws. In the *TTP*, Spinoza distinguishes the prescriptive form of law, integral to the social orders regulated by politics and religion, from natural law, realized in human beings through the power of reason or understanding. Thereafter, he distinguishes two domains of law, human and divine, on the basis of their respective ends. Both distinctions clarify the main line of argument of the *Ethics*. The *Ethics* has little to say about prescriptive law because its task is to ground and elaborate the domain of natural law, as Spinoza understands it. Here, it is important to reiterate that natural law for Spinoza expresses a necessity of nature, the power of understanding, which involves no prescriptive or

[45] The distinction is anticipated in *TTP* 4: "the man of flesh…. finds nothing in this highest good to touch or eat or affect the flesh, which is what gives him the greatest pleasure. This good consists only in contemplation and in a pure mind [*in sola speculatione, & pura mente*]" (G III 61/C II 129).

normative content. But the *TTP* also makes clear that natural law manifests itself in two forms, as human law and divine law. Although the *Ethics* offers a fuller account of the content of divine law as knowledge of the third kind, the distinction between human and divine law is sidelined in the later work. Had it been preserved, the argumentation of Part 4 would have been sharpened, allowing us to appreciate more readily the significance of the distinction between acting according to the guidance of reason as a means to "living more safely and agreeably" and acting according to the guidance of reason for no end except the knowledge and love of God.

If Spinoza had in hand the theoretical framework I have discerned in the *TTP*, why did he not lean more heavily on it in the *Ethics*? Why did he not make the distinctions between human law and divine law, and between prescriptive law and natural law, organizing principles of the *Ethics*? Although I do not have a fully satisfying answer to this question, we may speculate that Spinoza's focus on metaphysical issues in the *Ethics*—the nature of God, the necessary relation of finite things to God, the nature of the human mind, and the implications of these views for an understanding of the passions—led him to neglect an equally rigorous analysis of the ethical theory that rests on that metaphysics. Moreover, we may surmise that Spinoza's decision to make the opposition between the human mind's bondage and freedom the pivotal focus of the last two parts of the *Ethics* led him to downplay and even obscure the point that the mind's freedom can be achieved in two different ways: either in the form of a safer and more agreeable bodily existence, the end of a *ratio vivendi inter homines*, or in the form of blessedness, the end of the *vera vivendi ratio*. The *TTP* makes clear the fundamental importance of this distinction for Spinoza's thought; hence it reinforces the value of relying on this work as an interpretative lens through which to understand the ethics of the *Ethics*.

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PART IV

WONDER, FINAL CAUSES, AND MIRACLES

9

Is Wonder a Remedy against the Passions?

Spinoza's Struggle with Descartes's Legacy in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and in the *Ethics*

Andrea Sangiacomo

1. The Uses of Wonder from Descartes to Spinoza

Wonder (Lat. '*admiratio*'; French '*admiration*') plays a crucial role in Descartes's ethical theory. Wonder is not only one of the primitive affects, but generosity (which is defined as a species of wonder) is the remedy against the other passions and the key to moral virtue [*Passions de l'âme*, henceforth '*PdA*,' art. 156 (AT XI 447–8/CSMK I 385)]. Spinoza discusses wonder in all his major works (*Korte verhandeling* [*KV*], *Tractatus theologico-politicus* [*TTP*], and *Ethics*). However, his treatment of wonder changes significantly across these works. In the *KV*, Spinoza briefly mentions wonder among the primitive affects (as Descartes did) but he also reduces wonder to a merely cognitive state, and quickly dismisses it as nothing but a result of inadequate knowledge. Wonder receives a significantly more extensive treatment in Spinoza's *TTP*. In this work, wonder plays an ambiguous role, since it can be exploited both to foster superstitious conditionings and to consolidate peace and social stability through related affects, such as devotion (which derives from the combination of love and wonder). Spinoza's treatment of wonder in the *TTP* suggests that wonder *can* play a positive role, when used in appropriate conditions, to foster virtue and peaceful cooperation among individuals. This seemingly Cartesian-friendly position is abandoned again in the *Ethics*. Here, Spinoza not only denies that wonder is properly an affect but also suggests that wonder cannot possibly work as a remedy against the passions. Moreover, Spinoza explicitly dissociates generosity from wonder and offers a new definition of generosity that is at odds with Descartes's account.[1]

[1] Wonder was matter of debate also among Spinoza's friends involved in the circle *Nil volentibus arduum*. Members of the circle worked on the collective volume *Onderwys in de tooneel-poëzy* (composed around 1670 but never published until 1765). In this volume, several chapters can be attributed to Lodewijk Meyer and Johannes Bouwmeester. Meyer, in particular, is the author of chapter 30, which presents a general theory of the passions. Steenbakkers, *Spinoza's* Ethics, 103–28 (see in particular 120–2) presents how Meyer omits wonder from his catalogue of the passions, while Bouwmesteer includes wonder in his subsequent discussion. According to Steenbakkers, "it may have been unresolved questions of this kind that cause[d] *Nil volentibus arduum* to abandon the idea of publishing their collective work" (Steenbakkers, *Spinoza's* Ethics, 122). Concerning the *Onderwys in*

In this chapter, I reconstruct Spinoza's ambivalent treatment of wonder across his works. I argue that in the *TTP* Spinoza took into serious consideration Descartes's own account and his suggestion that wonder (or some affects derived from it) *can* play the role of a remedy against other, more dangerous passions. Nonetheless, I also maintain that this solution is dismissed in the final version of the *Ethics*. I locate the reason for this change in a significant conceptual novelty that Spinoza introduces in his account of the affects. In the *Ethics*, affects are more or less useful or dangerous depending on whether and how they foster agreement in nature among individuals.[2] Spinoza's account of agreement in nature builds on the bodily aptitude to be affected in a great many ways at the same time by external causes. Since wonder results from affections produced by isolated and exceptional objects, it tends to produce fixation and hinders the bodily ability to be affected in a great many ways. Spinoza considers the fixation associated with wonder as a threat to the bodily capacity to foster the body's agreement with external causes. What appeared as a resource to Descartes, Spinoza dismissed in the *Ethics* as a flaw. In conclusion, this reconstruction suggests that the evolution of Spinoza's ethical theory is much less linear than what might have been expected.

I proceed as follows. In §2, I summarize Descartes's account of wonder and generosity. In §3, I briefly sketch Spinoza's attitude toward it in the *Korte Verhandeling* and reconstruct Spinoza's treatment of wonder in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. In §4, I present Spinoza's account of wonder in the *Ethics* and I explain the divergences from the previous accounts on the basis of Spinoza's new understanding of agreement in nature as the key principle to assess the role and usefulness of the affects. I conclude, in §5, by summarizing my results and offering an overall assessment of the changes that Spinoza's moral views underwent across his major works.

2. Descartes on Wonder and Generosity

In *The Passions of the Soul* Descartes presents his most complete account of human anthropology.[3] According to Descartes, a human being is the union of a

de tooneel-poëzy, its composition, sources and authors, see Harmsen, *Onderwys in de toneel-poëzy*; and Sangiacomo, "Dichters en profeten."

[2] Scribano, "La connaissance" observed that one of the major theoretical differences between Spinoza's account of the passions in the *Korte verhandeling* and in the *Ethics* is the fact that only in the *Ethics* are the passions and their definitions derived from the *conatus*. Scribano suggested that this change is caused by Spinoza's reading of Hobbes's *Leviathan*. My account of agreement in nature further qualifies this difference. The notion of agreement in nature provides the ontological background for understanding how external causes affect *conatus* and power of acting. For the sources and evolution of Spinoza's account of agreement in nature and the evolution of Spinoza's account, see Sangiacomo, *L'essenza*, "The Ontology," "Before the Conatus," and *Supreme Good*. For a synthetic overview that contextualizes Spinoza's account of the passions in the early writings and in the *Ethics* with respect to both Descartes and Hobbes, see Garber, "Spinoza's Affects."

[3] For an introductory overview of Descartes's *Passions*, see Shapiro "The Structure."

thinking substance and an extended substance. Each of these two substances can be conceived of independently from the other, although they form a true unity together.[4] The mind-body compound implies a reciprocal causal interaction: the mind can act or be acted upon by the body, and the body can act or be acted upon by the mind. In the broader sense of the expression, "passions of the soul" are all those states of the human mind (e.g. thoughts) in which the soul passively receives some change in itself. In this sense, passions are any kind of "perception" [*PdA*, art. 19 (AT XI 343/CSMK I 335–6)]. However, Descartes introduces a stricter and more proper sense for the expression "passions of the soul," which will be his main object of research throughout the rest of the *Passions*. In the strict sense, passions are perceptions that are not caused by the soul itself (as are the perceptions through which the mind perceives its own volitions [*PdA*, art. 20 (AT XI 344/CSMK I 336)]) but rather by neural stimulations arising from the body insofar as they result in some modification of the soul. From this point of view, passions of the soul are distinguished from mere forms of imagining or dreaming about non-existent objects [*PdA*, art. 20 (AT XI 344/CSMK I 336)] as well as from mere sensory perceptions of external objects. Passions in the strict sense are mental states or thoughts that are perceived as immediate modifications of the soul but that are not produced by its own will.

An immediate and crucially important consequence of this account is that passions produce representational states. Because the soul is a thinking substance, every action that modifies the soul produces some modification of the soul's thinking substance—that is, whatever modifies the soul must result in some kind of idea or representation.[5] The problem to be discussed in the *Passions* does not concern mind-body interactions (which Descartes takes for granted) but rather how certain kinds of thoughts (i.e. passions) can interact with others (e.g. intellectual judgments and other volitions) by determining them or being determined and restrained.

The principal function of the passions is that "they move and dispose the soul to want the things for which they prepare the body" [*PdA*, art. 40 (AT XI 359/

[4] Descartes presents mind-body union as a primitive notion in his letter to Elisabeth dated May 21, 1643 (AT III 663–8/CSMK III 217–20). Elisabeth urged Descartes to clarify his position. See Shapiro, "Princess Elisabeth." However, the consistency of Descartes's answer raised perplexities in commentators. See e.g. Garber, "Understanding Interaction"; Shapiro, "What Do the Expressions." For the role that Descartes's account of union plays in the *Passions of the Soul*, see Shapiro, "The Structure"; Brown, *Passionate Mind*. For a defense of Descartes's account of union as a primitive notion, see Yandell, "Primitive Notion." For an overall defense of Descartes's interactionism, see O'Neill, "Mind-Body Interaction"; for a historical background of it, see Antoine-Mahut, *L'homme cartésien*. For a historical account of Descartes's dualism, see Rozemond, *Descartes's Dualism*; Landucci, *La mente in Cartesio*; Hattab, *Forms and Mechanisms*.

[5] This aspect is further explored and discussed by Alanen, *Concept of Mind*, 171–207; Brown, *Passionate Mind*, 84–115.

CSMK I 343)]. More specifically, passions dispose the soul to pursue or avoid what might be good for the mind-body compound:[6]

> I observe, moreover, that the objects which stimulate the senses do not excite different passions in us because of differences in the objects, but only because of the various ways in which they may harm or benefit us, or in general have importance for us. The function of all the passions consists solely in this, that they dispose our soul to want the thing which nature deems useful for us [*que la nature dicte nous estre utiles*], and to persist in this volition; and the same agitation of the spirits which normally causes the passions also disposes the body to make movements which help us to attain these things. [*PdA*, art. 52 (AT XI 359/CSMK I 349)]

Passions are the result of the fact that our body is designed by Nature (or by its Author) to pursue what is beneficial for its conservation. It is not up to the mind to decide or choose which needs the body has but these needs result from the body's own physical structure. From this point of view, passions are themselves "good" insofar as they dispose the mind to collaborate on the body's preservation. As Descartes stresses: "[passions] are all by nature good, and that we have nothing to avoid but their misuse or their excess" [*PdA*, art. 211 (AT XI 485/CSMK I 403)].[7]

However, passions can be unreliable insofar as several things that are truly good can provoke sadness in the first place, or passions can unduly increase (and thus misrepresent) the real goodness of the things they represent [*PdA*, art. 138 (AT XI 431/CSMK I 376–7)]. For this reason, it remains crucial that the mind keeps firm control over the formation of its judgments. This might be achieved by opposing judgments produced by passions with more adequate judgments based on a rational assessment of the actual perfection that a given good will bring to the mind-body compound. This role of reason in controlling the judgments produced by the passions is particularly relevant when we consider passions such as love and hatred as causes of desires—that is, as causes of those determinations that push the will to pursue or avoid specific courses of action. In these cases, in fact, Descartes explicitly claims that passions "insofar as they govern our

[6] This view is rooted in the "Sixth Meditation," in which Descartes presents all phenomena related to both internal and external senses as ultimately created by God in order to offer to the mind adequate means to pursue or avoid what can be conducive to the flourishing of the mind-body compound. On this point see Scribano, *Macchine*, 71–5. According to Shapiro, "What Are the Passions," the "I" presented in the meditation should not be read as a thoroughly disembodied subject since Descartes consistently refers to different passions that the meditator feels. This reading is further explored in Brown, *Passionate Mind*.

[7] This view entails a teleological element in Descartes's physiology, according to which the functioning of the human body machine is determined by the pursuit or avoidance of specific states. How this is compatible with Descartes's physics and its rejection of final causes is well explained by Des Chene, *Physiologia*; Lisa Shapiro, "Health"; Schmaltz, "Critique."

behavior by producing desire in us, it is certain that all those having a false cause may be harmful" [*PdA*, art. 143 (AT XI 436/CSMK I 379)].

However, this solution incurs an obvious problem. An agent forms desires based on mistaken judgments because she does not have sufficient knowledge to realize that what she is seeking is not truly good (or because her correct judgments turn out to be ineffective against the power of her passions). Desires based on mistaken judgments arise because the agent does *not* have the necessary knowledge to fight and oppose such desires. This is why it is so crucial to explain how an agent can resist the determination arising from passions and foster her desires to seek virtue. This problem is especially pressing when the agent has *not yet* acquired solid knowledge, which would be required to further consolidate her practice of virtue.

Descartes presents his solution at the beginning of the third part of the *Passions*, where he introduces his account of generosity. Generosity is a form of self-esteem, which is in turn a particular kind of wonder.[8] Accordingly, the best way to understand the nature of generosity is to briefly recall Descartes's account of wonder. Descartes defines this passion as follows: "a sudden surprise of the soul which brings it to consider with attention the objects that seem to it unusual and extraordinary" [*PdA*, art. 70 (AT XI 380/CSMK I 353)]. Wonder does not entail knowledge or judgments about its object, but rather is a condition for the mind to fix its attention upon a certain object previously unknown. In fact, we are more disposed to experience wonder when we encounter objects or events that are rare, which we do not yet know. The strength of wonder is associated with a movement of the animal spirits in the brain that is strong since the beginning [*PdA*, arts. 72–3 (AT XI 381–3/CSMK I 353–4)]. As Descartes explains, the perception of a new and unexpected object "affects the brain in certain parts where it is not normally affected; and since these parts are more tender or less firm than those hardened through frequent agitation, the effects of the movements produced in them are thereby increased" [*PdA*, art. 72 (AT XI 382/CSMK I 354)]. For this reason, such movement is more robust than other movements that increase only gradually, and it is oriented toward keeping the mind's attention fixed on the object of wonder. The function of wonder is to direct our attention and keep new information within our minds, without being distracted. As such, wonder is necessary to learn and memorize new things [*PdA*, art. 75 (AT XI 384/CSMK I 354–5)]. The excess of wonder consists in being surprised at any moment, although this excess can be corrected through knowledge (since the more we

[8] For a historical account of how Descartes's notion of generosity both derives and departs from the Aristotelian notion of "magnanimity" (from the Greek *megalopsychia*), see Verbeek, "Generosity." Rorty, "Functional Logic," suggests that generosity should be understood as an "internal emotion" of the soul, namely, as an action of the soul upon itself. Although Descartes admits internal emotions (*emotions intérieures*) in *PdA*, art. 147 (AT XI 440–1/CSMK I 381), he never presents generosity as an internal emotion (i.e. as an action) and explicitly describes it as a passion in the strict sense.

know, the less we are prone to excessive wonder). From this view it results that wonder is a static passion, in the sense that it is not oriented by itself to bring about any action or to pursue or avoid an object, but simply to fix our attention on some object.

At the beginning of part three of the *PdA*, Descartes explains that the passions of esteem and contempt are kinds of wonder, through which the mind judges a certain object as valuable or indifferent because of the wonder it produces upon it [*PdA* art. 150 (AT XI 444/CSMK I 383)]. Esteem is especially relevant in the moral domain when it becomes esteem for our own nature (i.e. self-esteem). The problem raised by self-esteem is to assess whether, and to what extent, it can be morally acceptable. Descartes aims to establish a distinction between a legitimate form of self-esteem and a depreciable form. The latter corresponds to the passion of "vanity" [*PdA* art. 157 (AT XI 448–9/CSMK I 385)] and the former to "generosity."[9]

As Descartes explains:

> I see only one thing in us which could give us good reason for esteeming ourselves, namely, the exercise of our free will and the control we have over our volitions. […] Thus I believe that true generosity, which causes a person's self-esteem to be as great as it may legitimately be, has only two components. The first consists in his knowing that nothing truly belongs to him but this freedom to dispose his volitions, and that he ought to be praised or blamed for no other reason than his using this freedom well or badly. The second consists in his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to use it well—that is, never to lack the will to undertake and carry out whatever he judges to be best. To do that is to pursue virtue in a perfect manner. [*PdA*, arts. 152–3 (AT XI 445–6/CSMK I 384)]

The only legitimate object of wonder in our own nature can be "the exercise of our free will and our command of our volitions." Given Descartes's definition of wonder, this exercise of our free will must *not* be a usual and daily experience. If legitimate self-esteem is a kind of wonder based on the contemplation of our free will, such free will could not be something commonly practiced and experienced because it would fail to produce real wonder.[10] However, Descartes is not committed to claim that we usually exercise our free will and command our volitions.

[9] Generosity is opposed not only to vanity (*PdA*, art. 157 [AT XI 448–9/CSMK I 385]), which is self-esteem based on an incorrect opinion of our own power), but also to vicious humility (*PdA*, art. 159 [AT XI 450/CSMK I 386]), which is a form of weakness of our mind when it is aware of its incapacity to rule its own passions. Generosity produces instead *virtuous* humility [*PdA*, art. 155 (AT XI 447/CMSK I 385)], which is the attitude to not value ourselves as better or more perfect than others.

[10] Descartes explicitly acknowledges that the contemplation of one's freedom can indeed cause wonder: "these movements are not due so much to surprise, because those who esteem themselves in this way are well acquainted with the causes of their self-esteem. It may be said, however, that these causes are so marvellous (namely, the power to make use of our free will, which causes us to value

On the contrary, people usually follow the determinations arising from their passions. This often leads agents to conduct their whole life on the basis of judgments and habitudes produced by passions and pay very little attention to their freedom.

Nonetheless, sometimes an agent can experience a force to resist her passions and to make right use of her freedom. This happens rarely, perhaps when the agent is engaged in the serious examination of her ideas and powers in order to attain intellectual truth (as it happens in the *Meditations*), or perhaps when she faces weaker passions that the mind is able to successfully oppose. Be this as it may, the exercise of freedom can be the object of wonder and produce self-esteem because it is arguably rare in most of our daily life. Should this exercise be common and easily attainable, there would be no reason to take it as the basis of self-esteem. Although the "freedom to dispose [one's] volitions" is not a daily experience, when it happens that the agent experiences such freedom, she remains astonished and realizes that this is the *right* way to behave. Analogously, "feeling a firm and constant resolution to use [freedom] well" is not common. Should this be the case, everyone would be virtuous and wise. Nonetheless, when it happens that an agent experiences her power to freely dispose her volitions (first element of generosity) she can also realize that this is the *right* way to use her freedom (second element of generosity).

This self-esteem, being a kind of wonder, fixes the agent's attention upon her power to use freedom well. In this way, generosity helps the agent to resist the determination arising from other passions by creating a desire to act generously and freely in future occasions as well. In general, generosity is a universal remedy against all passions insofar as it keeps the mind focused on what it can really and truly attain through its own power [*PdA*, art. 156 (AT XI 447–8/CSMK I 385)]. In Descartes's view, the greatest error produced by our desires is to attempt to do something that does not completely depend on our power [*PdA*, art. 144 (AT XI 436–7/CSMK I 379)]. These desires make our actions deeply influenced by fortune, producing fear, anger, and similar dangerous passions. The role of generosity is keeping the mind focused on the fact that (i) the only good that really depends on us is the good that results from our own power of free will (i.e. the good that depends entirely on us) and (ii) the mind should firmly pursue only this kind of good.

Generosity can work as a general remedy not because it entails any previously acquired habit to act according to the dictates of reason, but rather because of the specific movements of the animal spirits (similar to those observed in wonder) that generate and support it. Because generosity is a passion, the movements of

ourselves […]) that each time we consider them afresh they are a source of new wonder" [*PdA* art. 160 (AT XI 452–3/CSMK I 387)].

the animal spirits that engender generosity can directly influence the movements that support other passions. In fact, this bodily aspect of generosity is the kernel of Descartes's account.[11] Generosity entails specific movements in the animal spirits, which in turn dispose the soul to will certain things. The main reason why it is so difficult to resist the power of the passions is that they are provoked by bodily movements over which the soul has no direct control. Generosity is associated with a movement of the animal spirits similar to that of wonder, which is able to disrupt or oppose the course of the animal spirits produced by other passions. By interrupting the determination arising from other passions, generosity produces a kind of suspension or delay that allows the mind to assess the best course of action that should be undertaken.[12]

In order to contrast the precipitation with which other passions try to gain control over the subject, generosity creates a stable disposition not to act on the spot but rather to deliberate about any action according to the judgment that the will has decided to use as its guide in practical life. The precipitation produced by passions has to be opposed by another kind of firmness and resolution through which the soul can be led to use its freedom well. Generosity opposes passions not by producing adequate knowledge, but by determining the subject to use freedom at her best, namely, by acting only in a deliberate way. Incidentally, the subject can be mistaken, but those mistakes do not affect the firmness with which the generous subject strives to reason as well as she can. In this sense, virtue depends more on the intention with which the action is carried out than on its result.

[11] Shapiro, "Cartesian Generosity," stresses that generosity is a *passion* and acknowledges its dependence on wonder. She also tends to understand how generosity works as a remedy to the other passions by reading generosity into the background of the fourth *Meditation*. However, since the will does not have direct control over other passions, generosity could not work as a remedy without entailing an adequate movement in the animal spirits. Neglecting this bodily aspect of generosity makes Descartes's account fairly unintelligible. Nonetheless, it may be problematic to read the "Fourth Meditation" and the *Passions* as forming a consistent whole. Descartes explicitly claims that the "Fourth Meditation" is concerned only with contemplation and how we should use freedom to discover the truth, while the *Passions* are concerned with the practice of virtue and daily life. Concerning Descartes's "embodied" account of generosity as a kind of wonder, see Brown, *Passionate Mind*, 197–205.

[12] Scribano, "Il controllo," offers a remarkable reconstruction of the physiological details of Descartes's account of wonder and generosity. Scribano concludes that (my translation) "generosity can be introduced among the passions due to the alleged presence of wonder in it. However, generosity lacks the specific features that were evoked in the definition of wonder (i.e. surprise and ignorance), and that are replaced instead by their opposite (i.e. firmness and constancy)." Scribano's thesis is that Descartes was ready to face the problems raised by this view because he needed to provide a *passionate* remedy against other passions [cf. *PdA* arts. 45–8 (AT XI 362–7/CSMK I 345–7)]. I agree with Scribano's reconstruction of the physiology of generosity and on the reason why Descartes was committed to it. However, Descartes suggests that generosity is the result of three passions: wonder, joy, and love [*PdA* art. 160 (AT XI 451/CSMK I 387)]. The component of wonder in generosity makes the movement "vigorous from the start" and then the same movement "continues uniformly" [*PdA*, art. 160 (AT XI 452/CSMK I 387)] arguably because of the other emotional ingredients of generosity. Hence, it is true that generosity is different from wonder as such, but this is because wonder is only one of the main ingredients of generosity, which by itself entails also joy and love.

3. Wonder from the *Korte verhandeling* to the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

In this section, I compare Spinoza's treatment of wonder in the *Korte verhandeling* and in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. While in the *KV* Spinoza is rather dismissive toward wonder and takes a firm anti-Cartesian stance, he revaluates certain passions derived from wonder in the *TTP*, and he does so for reasons similar to those pointed out by Descartes and presented in the previous section.

In the second part of the *KV*, Spinoza deals with human passions and his treatment closely follows the enumeration that Descartes already offered in his *Passions of the Soul*. However, Spinoza's whole discussion is driven by a crucial difference that leads him to depart significantly from Descartes's own approach. As mentioned in the previous section, Descartes considered the passions of the soul as representational modifications of the mind, which are generated and supported by movements of the animal spirits. Passions, in the strict sense, have both a bodily and a mental component and this double nature is essential to Descartes's treatment. For instance, generosity can work as a general remedy against all the passions because it has both a mental and a bodily component. Spinoza dismisses this bodily aspect of the passions, beginning his discussion by stating:

> Knowledge [*kennisse*] is the proximate cause of all the 'Passions' of the soul. For we consider it quite impossible that if someone neither perceives nor knows in any of the preceding ways, he should be able to be moved to Love, or Desire, or any other modes of will. [*KV* II.2 (G I 56/C I 99)]

According to this definition, Spinoza's treatment of the passions consists in examining which kinds of passions are produced by different kinds of knowledge. It should be stressed that Spinoza's dismissal of the bodily aspects of the passions that characterized Descartes's account does not depend on his rejection of the interaction between mind and body. In the *KV* Spinoza maintains a kind of interactionism close to that introduced by Descartes himself.[13] Rather, Spinoza exploits a crucial element of Descartes's own account against Descartes himself. According to Descartes, the fight between the human will and passions is an *intra*-psychic conflict, insofar as the will cannot operate directly on the movements of the animal spirits that support different passions, but only on the representations in the soul that these movements produce and maintain. Spinoza's argument against Descartes's view focuses on the conflict between

[13] See e.g. *KV* II.19 (G I 92/C I 132). Like other early Cartesians, such as Cordemoy and La Forge, Spinoza does not accept that the mind could create or destroy a certain quantity of movement in the body, but he admits that it could change the direction of the animal spirits, which would be sufficient to explain voluntary motions in the body. Concerning Spinoza's debt to Cartesian physiology and his proximity to the positions of early Cartesians, see Scribano, *Macchine*.

representations produced by the passions and ideas produced by the mind itself. From Spinoza's point of view, what really matters about the passions has little to do with their bodily dimensions and a lot to do with the judgments and representations that engender different passions. For this reason, Spinoza argues:

> [I]t is easy to infer what are the principal causes of the passions. For regarding the body, and its effects, Motion and Rest, they cannot act on the soul otherwise than to make themselves known to it as objects. And according to the appearances they present to it, whether of good or bad, so the soul is also affected by them, not insofar as [the body] is a body (for then the body would be the principal cause of the passions), but insofar as it is an object, like all other things, which would also have the same effects if they presented themselves to the soul in the same way. [*KV* II.19 (G I 93–4/C I 133–4)]

Bodily movements can affect the mind only insofar as they are perceived and translated into representations and ideas of objects, which the mind judges as good or evil for it. Only insofar as these movements have a mental counterpart (i.e. only insofar as they are known as objects) can they produce the variety of passions we experience. Accordingly, Spinoza dismisses all the physiological details that Descartes so keenly explored, and directly focuses on the cognitive ways in which the mind perceives the objects by which it is affected. In this sense, Spinoza's account of the passions in the *KV* can be rightly considered as anti-Cartesian in its fundamental orientation. Let me exemplify this point by focusing on the case of wonder.

Descartes based his account of wonder and generosity in the *Passions* on three crucial features: (1) passions entail a bodily counterpart that plays an important role in mind-body interactions; (2) generosity is classified as a kind of wonder related to the exercise of the agent's freedom; and (3) generosity does not necessarily require the attainment of adequate knowledge and rather plays as a general remedy against other passions because the movement it engenders somehow blocks the movements produced by other passions.

Spinoza's account in the *KV* counters Descartes's on all three points: (1) passions are no longer caused by their bodily counterpart but are merely cognitive states and the remedy to the passions can only be cognitive (namely, adequate knowledge); (2) Spinoza strongly denies the reality of freedom of the will [*KV* II.1 (G I 82/C I 122)]; and (3) wonder is quickly dismissed as something that should be avoided since it "arises either from ignorance or from prejudice, is an imperfection in the man who is subject to this emotion" [*KV* II.4 (G I 61/C I 104)]. Since passions are merely cognitive states based on inadequate knowledge, the remedy to the passions should consist in acquiring adequate knowledge, and given that wonder arises from ignorance, it is inevitable to dismiss it altogether as unhelpful to counter other passions.

In this different theoretical framework, generosity acquires a different meaning. In *KV* II.8, Spinoza discusses *edelmoedigheid* (literally 'nobility'), which might be taken as a Dutch rendering of *generositas* or *générosité*.[14] In Spinoza's view, this passion is still praised, but it is defined as a form of "legitimate Self-esteem" acquired by "one who know his perfection according to its true worth, without passion, and without regard to [others'] esteem of him" [*KV* II.8 (G I 69/C I 111)]. This understanding of generosity is more in line with what Spinoza, in the *Ethics*, will call *acquiescentia in se ipso* or "Self-love or Self-esteem" (E3p55s, E4p52d). This is markedly different from Spinoza's understanding of *generositas* in that same work, because the latter (but not the former) is defined in terms of one's attitude toward others (as discussed here below).

The reason for Spinoza's rethinking of generosity in the *KV* is clear: having rejected the Cartesian account of free will, which constituted the bedrock of Descartes's conception of generosity, Spinoza can no longer share the same understanding of this passion. He thus defines generosity in more neutral terms (referring to the broad idea of "perfection" rather than to the specific perfection of having free will) and links this judgment to the ability to self-evaluate one's power based on reason, rather than on passions or others' judgments.[15] In any case, what was Cartesian generosity is demoted in the *KV* and no longer functions as the general remedy to all the other passions.

Given the results achieved in the *KV*, it is surprising to observe that wonder is by far one of the most discussed passions in the *TTP*.[16] Moreover, wonder (and passions connected with wonder, such as devotion) plays both a direct role in Spinoza's explanation of religious and social phenomena and an indirect role in his account of forms of political institutions, such as the Hebrew Theocracy. I shall examine these direct and indirect roles in turn.

[14] See discussion in Laerke, *Freedom of Philosophizing*, xvi and 251n40; Strawser, *Philosophy of Love*, 113–14.

[15] This is another point on which Spinoza's later thought will evolve significantly, since in the *Ethics* it can be argued that both one's own self-image and the representation of others are often shaped by imaginative desires. See Sangiacomo, "Passions and the Self."

[16] In quoting from the *TTP*, I indicate first the chapter and then the section of the text. For section numbers I follow the system introduced by Akkerman, Lagrée, and Moreau in O III. Curley uses the system introduced previously by Bruder. The table of correspondences between the two systems is provided in C II 767–9. In the *TTP*, *admiratio* appears sixteen times (pref, §§1 and 9; ch. 1, §§23 and 26; ch. 3, §5; ch. 6, §§1, 5, 7, 13; ch. 7, §1; ch. 14, §§10 and 12; ch. 17, §§2, 6, 7; ch. 20, §15). *Devotio* (which is a passion derived by wonder and love) appears twenty-one times (pref, 10; ch. 1, §6; ch. 5, §§5, 10, 16, 18; ch. 6, §§1, 13, 15, 20; ch. 9, §13; ch. 10, §13; ch. 12, §§5, 6, 12; ch. 14, §§9 and 10; ch. 17, §§23, 25; ch. 20, §§1 and 12). By way of comparison, the three affects that will be taken as the primitive affects the *Ethics*, namely, *cupiditas* (E3p9s, Def. Aff. 1), *laetitia* (E3p11s, Def. Aff. 2), and *tristitia* (E3p11s, Def. Aff. 3), appear only a few times in the *TTP*. *Cupiditas* appears only six times in total (ch. 5, §9; ch. 6, §1; ch. 7, §1; ch. 16, §§3 and 7; ch. 17, §4); *laetitia* appears also only six times (ch. 2, §§6 and 8; ch. 3, §1; ch. 5, §§8 and 11; ch. 17, §25); *tristitia* appears only three times (pref §4; ch. 2, §7; ch. 6, §15).

As I already observed elsewhere, wonder plays a direct role in defining the affective mechanisms associated with both superstition and true religion.[17] This double role makes wonder ambiguous. On the one hand, insofar as wonder is connected with superstitious practices, it is often associated with passions such as hope and fear. Wonder is exploited to attract the attention of common people and lead them to honor and trust ambitious preachers [*TTP* pref 9 (G III 6–7/C II 68); *TTP* 7.1 (G III 97/C II 170)]. Relying on the credulity of common people [*TTP* 1.23 (G III 21/C II 84)], preachers can use wonder to improve their political power. While this negative role of wonder is rather explicit, I would like to draw attention to a more positive role that wonder can play.

Prophets often exploit wonder to establish devotion toward God (which is a passion based on wonder and love). A crucial example in this usage of wonder is the prophets' appeal to miracles.[18] According to Spinoza, the psychological mechanism behind the belief in miracles works as follows:

> [T]he common people think God's power and providence are established most clearly when they see something unusual happen in nature, which is contrary to the opinion they have of nature from custom. This is particularly so if the event has turned out to their profit or advantage. They judge that nothing can prove God's existence more clearly than that nature, as they think, does not maintain its order. [*TTP* 6.1 (G III 81/C II 152)]

Common people are not supposed to have highly developed philosophical skills. On the contrary, their ignorance of natural causes makes them prone to wonder. While common people are familiar with regular natural events, miracles seem inexplicable and suggest the intervention of some supernatural power [*TTP* 6.5 (G III 82/C II 153)]. The exceptionality and uniqueness of this sudden disruption of (what is perceived as) the regular course of nature leads common people to admire God's power, and strengthens their devotion (which is the combination of wonder and love [*TTP* 6.13 (G III 83/C II 155)]) and reverence (which is the combination of wonder and fear [*TTP* 17.2 (G III 202/C II 297)]).

This mechanism of wonder entailed by miracles is nothing exceptional. Wonder is triggered by rare and extraordinary objects (or doctrines) that have never been previously experienced. As a result, the more people get acquainted with certain phenomena (or doctrines), the less they will be subject to wonder about them. Habituation extinguishes wonder. As a result, both preachers fighting to gain political power and prophets aiming to establish religious beliefs need to constantly restore wonder. Cynic preachers aiming to get more power usually

[17] Sangiacomo, "Relational Autonomy."
[18] See Rosenthal, "Miracles, Wonder, and the State" and Scribano, "Miracles."

attempt to introduce new doctrines, leading to superstition. Prophets, instead, appeal to new miracles.

According to Spinoza, passions based on wonder are essential to establish and maintain true religion. Spinoza considers as a dogma of universal faith the belief in the uniqueness of God. This point has nothing to do with metaphysical reasons, but rather with the psychological mechanisms associated with wonder (which only rare and unique objects can trigger). As Spinoza writes:

> [God] is unique. No one can doubt that this too is absolutely required for supreme devotion, admiration and love towards God. For devotion [*devotionem*], admiration [*admirationem*] and love arise only because the excellence of one surpasses that of the rest. [*TTP* 14.10 (G III 177/C II 268)]

The uniqueness of God (and of God's power) is a requirement for activating those passions based on wonder (devotion, admiration, reverence) that make obedience possible. As Spinoza states while interpreting God's revelation on Mount Sinai:

> Though the voice the Israelites heard could not give them any philosophical or mathematical certainty about God's existence, still, it was enough to make them wonder at God [*admirationem Dei*], insofar as they had previously known him, and to motivate them to obedience. [*TTP* 14.12 (G III 179/C II 270)]

This connection between wonder and obedience brings to the table a second, more indirect role, that wonder (and passions based on it) plays in shaping and maintaining political institutions. Insofar as common people are all subject to wonder (or related affects) about God, they are all equal subjects to God. In this way, while wonder establishes a hierarchical, vertical relationship of obedience of each individual toward God, it also establishes a more egalitarian, horizontal relationship among individuals themselves. The ancient Hebrew state constituted a form of theocracy, insofar as it transferred the supreme power to God directly. However, it was also a sort of democracy insofar as all citizens were considered equal. As Spinoza explains:

> The Hebrews didn't transfer their right to anyone else, but everyone surrendered his right equally, as in a Democracy, and they cried out in one voice "whatever God says" (without any explicit mediator) "we will do." It follows that everyone remained completely equal by this covenant, that the right to consult God, and to receive and interpret his laws, was equal for everyone. Everyone held the whole administration of the state equally, without qualification. [*TTP* 17.9 (G III 206/C II 303)]

Wonder (and related affects) toward God is thus not only the force that can establish obedience, but also the glue that, by indirectly promoting equality, maintains peaceful social cooperation.[19] Of course, mechanisms based on wonder are not necessarily the most stable, nor can they a priori succeed against stronger passions (such as ambition and glory). In this sense, more than a remedy against other passions, Spinoza suggests in the *TTP* that wonder (and related affects) can be used as a means of regulating affective mechanisms and leading them to establish relatively peaceful forms of social cooperation.

The instability of these forms of peaceful cooperation based on wonder emerges from Spinoza's analysis of the process that led to the corruption and final dissolution of the ancient Hebrew state. While initially akin to a form of democracy, the state turned quickly into a more autocratic regime under Moses's rule [*TTP* 17.9 (G III 207/C II 303)], and later into a more unstable structure after Moses's death [*TTP* 17 (G III 208–11/C II 306–10)]. Spinoza locates in the weakening of the original egalitarian setting of the state the fundamental cause of its ruin. As Spinoza writes:

> In the first state no [religious] decree could derive its validity from the high Priest, since they had no right to make [religious] decrees, but only to give God's answers when asked to do so by the rulers or the councils. […] But after they had acquired the power to handle the affairs of the state, and had joined the right to rule to that of priesthood, each one began to seek the glory of his own name both in religion and in other matters, determining everything by priestly authority and daily issuing new decrees, concerning ceremonies, the faith, and everything else, decrees they wanted to be no less sacred and to have no less authority than the laws of Moses. The result? Religion declined into a deadly superstition and the true meaning and interpretation of the laws was corrupted. [*TTP* 18.4 (G III 223/C II 324)]

According to Spinoza, the priests' ambition to acquire political power fostered the corruption and eventual fall of the ancient Hebrew state, by leading to a period of conflict and civil war [*TTP* 18.4 (G III 223–4/C II 325)].

For present purposes, it is important to note that while the mechanisms of wonder can be used to foster a quasi-democratic and egalitarian political setting, they can also be exploited to foster a form of demagogy. As Spinoza explains in the *Preface* to the *TTP* (and as he repeats in the passage just quoted above) superstition thrives when people are dominated by their wonder about certain leaders (supported by their aura of novelty of their doctrines or by alleged marvelous phenomena). These leaders, fighting to increase and consolidate their own power,

[19] See on this point Rosenthal, "Function of Prophecy"; James, *Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*.

seek to unify people into sects. However, this operation is not aimed at establishing a peaceful and stable form of social cooperation, but on the contrary, it is intrinsically oriented to foster conflicts (both toward external enemies and against individuals who do not belong to the sect). In this sense, this latter form of organization might be called 'demagogical' (in opposition to the more 'democratic' form that Spinoza described in *TTP* 17.9, commented above).

Let me summarize what has emerged so far. In Spinoza's *TTP*, important aspects of Descartes's account of wonder are missing. The bodily mechanisms of wonder and generosity themselves are remarkably absent in Spinoza's discussion. However, the *TTP* suggests a partial rehabilitation of the positive role that wonder *can* play. Spinoza (like Descartes did before him) recognizes that the power of wonder of fixing the agent's attention on a peculiar exceptional object might work in positive and fruitful ways (given appropriate conditions and in combination with certain specific affects). In particular, wonder (and related affects) plays a crucial role in establishing obedience and maintaining a sort of social egalitarianism when (i) wonder is directed toward the most excellent and unique of all objects, namely, God; and (ii) when it is combined with the love toward this excellent object (i.e. when it becomes devotion). While Spinoza dismissed wonder in the *KV* because it originated and was fostered by ignorance, in the *TTP* the fact that wonder does *not* presuppose adequate knowledge makes it an important resource to balance social passions in contexts in which most of the agents do not have highly developed rational skills. This use of wonder *in the absence* of adequate knowledge was one of the main reasons that led Descartes to consider a special kind of wonder (i.e. generosity) as a general remedy against the passions. Like Descartes, Spinoza acknowledges the ambivalent role that wonder can play in the regulation of affects and pays attention to the strategies that can be used to maximize wonder's potential benefits.

4. Wonder and Generosity in the *Ethics*

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza's assessment of wonder changes again. Wonder no longer appears as an affect in itself, although it is easily associated with a number of proper affects. As Spinoza explains:

> This affection of the mind, or this imagination of a singular thing, insofar as it is alone in the mind, is called *wonder*. But if it is aroused by an object we fear, it is called *consternation*, because wonder at an evil keeps a man so suspended in considering it that he cannot think of other things by which he could avoid that evil. But if what we wonder at is a man's prudence, diligence, or something else of that kind, because we consider him as far surpassing us in this, then the wonder is called *veneration*. Otherwise, if what we wonder at is the man's anger,

> envy, and the like, the wonder is called *dread*. Next, if we wonder at the prudence, diligence, and the like, of a man we love, the love will thereby (by P12) be greater and this love joined to wonder, or veneration, we call *devotion*. In this way we can also conceive hate, hope, confidence, and other affects to be joined to wonder, and so we can deduce more affects than those which are usually indicated by the accepted words. So it is clear that the names of the affects are found more from the ordinary usage [of words] than from an accurate knowledge [of the affects]. [E3p52s]

Wonder, per se, is not an affect. It does not involve any transition between different degrees of power of acting, as affects usually entail (E3 Def. Aff. 2–3). In fact, wonder is merely "the imagination of a thing in which the mind remains fixed because this singular imagination has no connection with the others" (E3 Def. Aff. 4). According to Spinoza, imagination works by association. When the mind conceives of a certain image, it immediately recalls similar images and the mind's attention moves from one to the other (E2p18). However, when the mind conceives of something that has no apparent relationship with previously experienced objects, this image stands alone and the mind's attention remains fixed upon it. As such, wonder does not arise from "any positive cause which distract[s] the mind from other things, but only from the fact that there is no cause determining the mind to pass from regarding one thing to thinking of others" (E3 Def. Aff. 4 ex.).

Despite the fact that wonder, as such, is not an affect, E3p52s quoted above entails that wonder represents a particular disposition of the mind, which can in turn strengthen a number of other affects. Insofar as the mind remains fixed in the contemplations of certain extraordinary objects that do not seem to have anything in common with others (E3p52), the passions associated with those objects are enhanced as well. This power of fixing the mind's attention was crucial for Descartes's account, and Spinoza himself appreciates certain usages of it in the *TTP*. However, in the *Ethics* this same fundamental trait of wonder leads to an opposite evaluation of its usefulness and ultimately to deny wonder any positive role. I will first present how Spinoza dismisses the role of wonder and then offer an explanation of this theoretical turn.

The clearer instance of Spinoza's dismissal of the role of wonder appears as a consequence of his presentation of the "power of the intellect" in dominating the passions, at the beginning of the fifth part of the *Ethics*. Spinoza insists on the fact that the greatest resource and strength associated with reason is the fact that rational ideas, built on common notions, are connected with a variety of different objects and can therefore be more easily recollected (E5p13). While passions associated with a unique and rare object might be stronger on the spot (E5p5), affects arising from reason remain stronger over a longer period (E5p7–E5p9) because they are associated with a greater number of different causes and

objects, which the mind considers insofar as they share certain common properties.

For present purposes, I shall not delve into the mechanism of Spinoza's therapy discussed in E5. What is noteworthy for the present discussion of wonder is that wonder (and its related affects) is intrinsically unable to help the mind to gain rational control over its affects. This is because wonder is the main instance of the mind's fixation on some extraordinary object, and thus the main cause of its inability to conceive of common properties shared by great many things (E2p37–E2p39).

A further important signal of Spinoza's negative assessment of wonder in the *Ethics* is provided by his dissociation of generosity from wonder. As I mentioned in section one, Descartes considered generosity the key remedy to the disorders of the passions. Generosity's role is rooted in the physiological mechanism of wonder and in its ability to counter the movements in the animal spirits produced by other passions. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza mentions generosity but only by completely redefining its meaning.

At the end of E3, Spinoza briefly presents those affects that express a proper form of activity and thus are not passions but properly actions. All these active affects are related to joy and desire (E3p59) and Spinoza classifies them as follows:

> All actions that follow from affects related to the mind insofar as it understands I relate to strength of character [*fortitudo*], which I divide into tenacity [*animositas*] and nobility [*generositas*]. For by tenacity I understand the desire [*cupiditas*] by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to preserve his being. By nobility I understand the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and join them to him in friendship. Those actions, therefore, which aim only at the agent's advantage, I relate to tenacity, and those which aim at another's advantage, I relate to nobility. So moderation, sobriety, presence of mind in danger, and so forth, are species of tenacity, whereas courtesy, mercy, and so forth, are species of nobility. [E3p59s]

All affects that express our actions are expressions of our own power of acting insofar as the agent is fully able to bring about those effects that follow from her own essence. *Fortitudo* represents the genre of these kinds of affects, which all have in common the fact of expressing the *higher* degrees of the agent's power of acting. Moreover, Spinoza explicitly considers *generositas* as a kind of *fortitudo* aimed at another's advantage, by thus completely divorcing generosity and wonder. The opposition to Descartes's account of *générosité* could not be sharper.[20]

[20] The phrasing of the passage (with the use of *intelligo*, namely, "I understand") suggests that Spinoza wants to stress that he is presenting *his* own definition of generosity, and not Descartes's (whose name was nonetheless conveyed to the reader a few pages earlier in the preface to the third part of the *Ethics*).

Spinoza's account of *generositas* departs from Descartes's views on four crucial points. First, in Spinoza's view, *generositas* is no longer a passion but an action, and thus an expression of the agent's own power of acting and thinking. Second, *generositas* no longer has to do with the agent's wonder about her own freedom, but rather with the agent's desire to take care of others.[21] As already mentioned, Spinoza no longer considers wonder as an affect properly speaking (E3 Def. Aff. 4 Ex.), since it does not entail any transition between different degrees of power of acting. Therefore, the active affect of generosity cannot be a species of wonder. Third, *generositas* is no longer compatible with mistaken judgments (as was the case in Descartes's treatment but also in Spinoza's discussion in both the *KV* and the *TTP*) but it derives from rational desire and adequate ideas, and thus presupposes that a generous agent acts under the guidance of reason. As an expression of the agent's higher degrees of power of acting, generosity (in Spinoza's sense) expresses the agent's own power of thinking. Fourth, *generositas* is no longer the remedy against the disorder of the passions, but rather the consequence of the fact that the agent has been able to check her own passions and make the best of them in order to foster her own power of acting and thinking.

Active affects play a very limited role in Spinoza's overall discussion. Besides the mention they receive in E3p59, Spinoza discusses *generositas* again only in E4p46 as the way in which those who live under the guidance of reason face hatred. Moreover, Spinoza compares *generositas* with *superbia* in E4p57. Eventually, in E4p73, at the very end of the fourth part, Spinoza explicitly remarks that he does "not consider it worthwhile to demonstrate separately here all the properties of strength of character" (E4p73s). Although *fortitudo* and active affects represent the peak of human perfection, Spinoza's main focus concerns how agents can progress toward this peak of perfection by increasing their power of acting. This process of progressive enhancement starts from the lower degrees of the individual's power of acting, in which the individual is far from able to practice *fortitudo* and *generositas*.

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza not only denies that wonder (properly speaking) is an affect, but he also suggests that any form of wonder (*pace* Descartes, and *pace*

[21] Toto, "La théorie de l'estime" offers a further way of contrasting Descartes's treatment of the passions and Spinoza's account in the *Ethics*. According to Toto, Descartes's model of perfect moral conduct (as it is reflected in his account of generosity) ultimately aims to promote the self-sufficiency of the subject and her capacity to be content in herself. Toto shows that, at several crucial points, Descartes introduces elements that would lead to a more robust account of intersubjective recognition, but his moral model of self-sufficiency prevents the development of these elements. According to Toto, Spinoza departs from this individualist approach. The individual power of acting in the *Ethics* ultimately depends on external causes and interactions with other individuals. Spinoza acknowledges the crucial role that intersubjective reconnaissance plays in shaping moral relationships. In this context, Toto emphasizes Spinoza's account of the imitation of the affects as a key feature that distinguishes Descartes's and Spinoza's moral views. With regard to Toto's reading, my account of agreement in nature provides further ontological background to appreciate the fundaments of Spinoza's view in the *Ethics*.

what Spinoza himself suggested in the *TTP*) could ever help in the mastering of the passions. At this point, it is worth asking why Spinoza arrived at this conclusion. My answer is the following.

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza explains how knowledge itself is nothing but the mental counterpart of the body's power of acting. The increase of the body's power of acting depends both on the body's own *conatus* and on the way in which the individual interacts with external causes. Spinoza argues that insofar as interactions are based on common or shared properties, they cannot be harmful and rather increase the individual's power of acting. The mental counterpart of this kind of interaction based on agreement in nature is the mind's capacity to form adequate ideas based on common notions.

In the *Ethics*, passions foster or hinder the achievement of the Supreme Good depending on whether they foster or hinder agreement in nature. For instance, Spinoza distinguishes passions that are always detrimental (such as passions based on hatred: E4p45 and E4p48) from passions that can be sometimes indirectly positive (such as passions of sadness that sometimes are helpful to compensate for excessive passions of joy: E4p41, E4p42, E4p44, E4p47).

A crucial feature of Spinoza's account is its emphasis on the body's capacity to be affected in a great many ways at the same time. This aspect is connected with the body's capacity to increase its agreement in nature with the external causes. The more a body can be affected in many ways, the more it is capable of adapting to different external conditions and thus interacting with different external causes on the basis of shared common properties (E4p38).[22]

Considering this picture, it is not a surprise that wonder loses much of its attractiveness as a remedy against the other passions. For Descartes (and for Spinoza in the *TTP*), wonder's greatest potential is its power of fixing the agent's attention on a certain object, by contrasting fluctuation and opposing other rival passions. In the *Ethics*, however, Spinoza's account of affects entails that fixation *cannot* have positive consequences for the individual's *conatus*, insofar as it reduces the individual's capacity to affect and be affected in many ways, and thus its capacity to foster agreement in nature with external causes. In this new conceptual framework, wonder loses its ambiguity and is unreservedly discarded as unhelpful.

5. Spinoza's Changing Mind

The evolution of Spinoza's moral philosophy concerning the use of wonder is far from linear and this might raise concerns about whether it would be charitable to ascribe to Spinoza such a convoluted way of developing his position. To conclude

[22] For a fuller development of this point see Sangiacomo, *Supreme Good*.

my discussion, let me explain why this path, though not straightforward, reveals in fact something relevant about Spinoza's moral views and their relationship with Descartes.

Spinoza's dismissal of wonder in the *Ethics* is very different from his dismissal of wonder in the *KV*, where he defends a rather strict form of ethical intellectualism, according to which the achievement of the Supreme Good is *merely* a cognitive enterprise.[23] In the *Ethics* the picture is more complicated and the way in which the body works within its causal network plays a crucial role in fostering or hindering progress toward the Supreme Good. Wonder is dismissed in the *KV* because of its *cognitive* connotation (i.e. because it is based on ignorance and thus is at odds with the Supreme Good, which is defined in terms of adequate knowledge). Wonder is dismissed in the *Ethics* because its *psycho-physiological* aspect, namely, the fact that wonder arises from the lack of images similar to a given object. This lack of association hinders the body and the mind's power of being affected in many ways and ultimately their power of increasing their agreement in nature with external causes. In turn, maximizing agreement in nature is the key condition for (i) increasing one's power of acting; (ii) increasing one's power of thinking adequately (i.e. forms ideas of common notions and thus builds rational knowledge); and thus (iii) reaching the Supreme Good. Despite the explicit polemics with Descartes's dualism and its consequences for understanding the nature of the passions (E5 pref), the *Ethics* does reintegrate in its conceptual framework a detailed consideration of the *psycho-physiological* component of the affects that was lacking in the *KV* and was at the core of Descartes's own account. In this sense, the *Ethics* reintegrates a pivotal Cartesian theme while offering a significantly different solution from that defended by Descartes.

The fact that wonder plays some positive role in the *TTP* reveals how this work represents a real turning point in Spinoza's career. On the one hand, Spinoza's position in the *TTP* moves beyond the strict ethical intellectualism of the early works and recognizes some important role that certain passions can play in supporting and fostering the pursuit of the Supreme Good. On the other hand, this role of the passions is not clearly worked out from a theoretical point of view and, perhaps for lack of a better account, Spinoza takes on board a suggestion already advanced by Descartes's treatment of wonder and generosity. While the state of ignorance associated with wonder led Spinoza to dismiss it in the *KV*, this same state makes wonder (or certain affects based on it) a potentially useful passion in the *TTP*, especially for common people who for the most part lack any adequate philosophical knowledge.

These considerations suggest that the evolution of Spinoza's moral philosophy can be characterized by two turning points. The first occurs between the *KV* and

[23] On this point, see Sangiacomo, "Fixing Descartes."

the *TTP* and consists in Spinoza's overcoming of his early strict ethical intellectualist position. The second turning point occurs between the *TTP* and the *Ethics* and consists in the introduction of Spinoza's mature theory of affects based on the notion of agreement in nature. The *Ethics* formulates the conceptual framework that the *TTP* lacks. This entails not only a better clarification of certain claims that were advanced without much argument in the *TTP*, but it also has the cost of dismissing certain earlier tenets. Wonder pays this cost.

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10

Finalism, Religion, and Miracles

From the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* to the *Ethics*

Emanuela Scribano

1. Finalism and Miracles

In the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (*TTP*) Spinoza devotes the entirety of chapter 6 to miracles. The subject of miracles also recurs, albeit only incidentally, in the *Ethics*, in the extensive Appendix to Part I. In both cases, miracles are associated with an interpretation of nature—namely, that nature tends to the advantage of man—which Spinoza staunchly opposed. There is, however, an important difference between the two texts.

Chapter 6 of the *TTP* starts with references to popular beliefs. Ordinary people consider that extraordinary natural events, the cause of which cannot be explained, are evidence of God's presence:

> The common people call unusual works of nature miracles, *or* works of God. […] [T]hey don't want to know the natural causes of things. They long to hear only things they're most ignorant of, which they're most amazed by. [*TTP* 6 (G III 81/C II 153)]

Spinoza immediately identifies the origin of this attitude:

> This [attitude] seems to have originated with the earliest Jews. The Gentiles of their time worshiped visible Gods, such as the Sun, the Moon, the Earth, Water, Air, etc. To prove them wrong and to show them that those Gods were weak and inconstant, *or* changeable, and under the rule of an invisible God, the Jews related their miracles, by which they tried to show that the whole of nature was directed only for their advantage, by the command of the God they worshipped. [*TTP* 6 (G III 81–2/C II 153)]

Although the beginning of the chapter presents the belief in miracles as generally widespread among the "people," Spinoza traces its origin to a particular group of people: the Jews. Indeed, the Jews are said to have propagated the belief in miracles in order to convince the pagans to abandon polytheism and embrace their

own monotheism and to convince others of God's particular favor toward the Jews. To this end the Jews recounted the miracles done by the invisible God, intending primarily to demonstrate that "the whole of nature was directed only for their advantage, by the command of the God they worshiped." Hence the belief in miracles is aimed at demonstrating that the whole of nature is governed by the only God recognized by the Jews, who does so purely for the well-being of his chosen people. The belief in miracles thus conceals a design for the supremacy of the Jewish people.

The use that the Jews made of miracles was so attractive that people more generally began to seek out events that could be passed off as miracles, so that these too could be presented as the final cause on account of which God had created all things: "This was so pleasing to men that to this day they haven't ceased to feign miracles, so that they might be believed to be dearer to God than the rest, and the final cause on account of which God has created, and continually directs, all things" [*TTP* 6 (G III 82/C II 153)]. In the *TTP* recognition of final causes in the world, directed for the advantage of men, thus makes its appearance as ethnocentric.

This account of the Jewish origin of the belief in miracles and anthropocentric finalism is combined with other similar characteristics attributed to the Jews, such as that of ignoring intermediate causes and always attributing every event to God, or that of referring to God any events of which they did not know the cause. However, miracles and finalism are a special case. The Jewish tendency to attribute all events to God explains many expressions used in the Bible, without ruling out that it is a practice also widespread among other peoples. But Spinoza's identification of the Jews' belief in miracles and finalism in nature stresses the ethnocentric origin of this belief and explains how it spread to other human populations, through a competition for the title of people dearest to God.

In contrast, in the discussion of finalism in the *Ethics*, there is no reference at all to the spread of these beliefs through the special agency of one specific group of people. Rather, in the *Ethics*, Spinoza sees the prejudice in favor of final causes as a spontaneous and completely general tendency of everyone:

> [*M*]*en* act always on account of an end, viz. on account of their advantage, which they want. Hence they seek to know only the final causes of what has been done […]. [E1app (G II 78/C I 440), emphasis mine]

People's inability to identify the final causes of natural events then leads them to project the ends that they themselves pursue onto nature, and in this way, they convince themselves that there is "a ruler, or a number of rulers of nature, endowed with human freedom, who have taken care of all things for them, and made all things for their use" [E1app (G II 79/C I 441)]. In just a few steps, the spontaneous belief in finalism in nature is transformed into the—equally

spontaneous—belief that there are one or more gods who made nature for the sake of human well-being: finalism is joined with anthropocentrism. Finally, people endow the gods with human attributes: anthropocentrism is joined with anthropomorphism.

There is however a point of contact between the Appendix to E1 and the *TTP*. In the *Ethics*, immediately after presenting a summary of the stages leading from the finalism of nature to anthropocentrism concerning the purposes of the god/s and from this to anthropomorphism, regarding the god/s as modeled on themselves, Spinoza observes: "So it has happened that each of them has thought up from his own temperament different ways of worshipping God, *so that God might love them above all the rest, and direct the whole of Nature according to the needs of their blind desire and insatiable greed*" [E1app (G II 79/C I 441), emphasis mine]. The passage from the *TTP* quoted above clarifies the inversion that the subject has undergone in passing from the *TTP* to the *Ethics*. While in the *TTP* finalism emerges in the context of God favoring one group of people over others, in the *Ethics* the ethnocentric use of the prejudice in favor of final causes is established only after finalism had already come into being. In the *Ethics* the belief in miracles then appears fleetingly as a consequence of the very same ignorance of the causes that generated finalism. Moreover, those whom the people venerated "as interpreters of nature and the Gods" strive to keep this belief alive, as well as ignorance from which it originates, to support their power:

> One who seeks the true causes of miracles, and is eager […] to understand natural things, […] is generally considered and denounced as an impious heretic by those whom the people honor as interpreters of Nature and the Gods. For they know that if ignorance is taken away, then foolish wonder, the only means they have of arguing and defending their authority is also taken away. [E1app (G II 81/C I 443–4)]

2. The Origin of Religion

The changing relationship in Spinoza's thought between what I will call anthropocentric finalism, the idea that the world is directed at our pleasure and advantage, and the rivalry between human groups contending for the favor of the gods, is a sign of a much more radical change: namely, a fundamental reconsideration of Spinoza's views on the origin of religion.

In the Appendix to E1, the origin of religion is traced to anthropocentric finalism:

> After they considered things as means, they could not believe that the things had made themselves; but from the means they were accustomed to prepare for

> themselves, they had to infer that there was a ruler, or a number of rulers of nature, endowed with human freedom, who had taken care of all things for them, and made all things for their use. […] Thus this prejudice was changed into superstition, and struck deep roots in their minds. [Elapp (G II 79/C I 441)]

The transformation of the prejudice toward final causes into the belief in "a ruler or a number of rulers of nature," and from that into superstition, which Spinoza hints at here, represents another important point of comparison between the *TTP* and the *Ethics*.

In the *TTP* Spinoza makes no connection between finalism and the origin of superstition. In fact, in the *TTP* superstition derives directly from passions. Much of the preface of the *TTP* is devoted to this subject and to the social and political danger of a phenomenon of entirely irrational origin: "[superstition] is protected only by hope, hate, anger, and deception, because it arises, not from reason, but only from the most powerful affects" [*TTP* Pref (G III 6/C II 68)]. That explains why all people are naturally inclined to superstition. This explanation of the origin of superstition effectively rules out that superstition may contain some glimmer of truth, and at the same time explains its universality: "Some say that superstition arises from the fact that all mortals have a certain confused idea of divinity. My account of the cause of superstition clearly entails […] that all men by nature are subject to superstition" [*TTP* Pref (G III 6/C II 68)].

This argument in the preface to the *TTP* suggests that Spinoza may have read Hobbes's *Leviathan* recently.[1] According to Hobbes, the origin of religion lies in a passion—fear—fueled by ignorance of natural causes. This origin explains its universality and naturalness, without any reference to its truth:

> This perpetual fear, always accompanying mankind in the ignorance of causes (as it were in the dark), must needs have for object something. And therefore,

[1] Spinoza owned a copy of Hobbes's *De Cive*. However, this work does not present Hobbes's theory concerning the origin of religion, which is instead developed in *Leviathan* chapters 11 and 12. Spinoza did not know English, but he may have read *Leviathan* in its Latin translation, which was included as the third and last part of Hobbes's Latin works in *Opera philosophica*, published in Amsterdam in 1668, and then republished separately in 1670. Even more likely, Spinoza may have read the *Leviathan* in the Dutch translation made by his friend Abraham van Berkel, published in Amsterdam in 1667. For a general overview of the circulation of Hobbes's works in the Netherlands, see Secretan, "Réception de Hobbes." See also Sacksteder, "How Much of Hobbes." For details concerning van Berkel's translation see Wielema, "van Berkel's Translations." Among various other pieces of evidence suggesting that Spinoza may have read *Leviathan* directly, one should also include Spinoza's use of the notion of 'conatus' in the *Ethics* in a sense very close to the way it is used in Hobbes's work. See Scribano, "Connaissance." See also Rousset, "Eléments" for a convincing hypothesis concerning Hobbes's influence in the transition from the initial to the final draft of the *Ethics*.

> when there is nothing to be seen, there is nothing to accuse, either of their good, or evil fortune, but some *power*, or agent *invisible*; in which sense, perhaps, it was, that some of the old poets said, that the gods were at first created by human fear.[2]

In the *TTP*, a least, Spinoza agrees with Hobbes: "The reason, then, why superstition arises, lasts, and increases, is fear" [*TTP* Pref (G II 5/C II 67)]. Even if religion has a natural origin in human passions and is not created by politicians, both Hobbes and Spinoza believe that priests and politicians have always used religion to strengthen their grip over power.[3]

Hobbes explicitly relates religion and superstition: "This fear of things invisible is the natural seed of that which everyone in himself calleth religion, and in them that worship or fear that power otherwise than they do, superstition."[4] In the Preface to the *TTP*, Spinoza focus is on the origin of "superstition," though it seems that the whole phenomenon of belief in the supernatural is involved here as well. True religion, on the other hand, is supposed to emerge from the reform of biblical exegesis he proposes later in the *TTP*. But, for the time being, politicians must set certain constraints on religion—"whether true or illusory" [*TTP* Pref (G III 7/C II 68)]—since any form of religion can have the same dangerous consequences.[5] On the other hand, in the Appendix to E1, Spinoza's real target is clearly the origin not just of superstition, but of the phenomenon of religion in general, since the investigation concerns the origin of every belief in a god other than the God of which Spinoza spoke in the first part of the *Ethics*. Both monotheism and polytheism are, without distinction, said to have sprung from a prejudice toward finalism—"a ruler, or a number of rulers of nature"—and both—without distinction—eventually turned into "superstition."

In the *Ethics* the role of fear in creating superstition is still at issue. Actually, fear and hope are mentioned by discussing their influence on the origin of particular superstitions concerning "things which are accidental causes of Hope or Fear (which) are called good or bad omens" [E3p50s (G II 177/C I 521)], as in the

[2] Hobbes, *Leviathan* ch. 12.6; Curley, *Leviathan*, 64. See *TTP* Pref (G III 6/C II 68), quoted above: "[superstition] is protected only by hope, hate, anger, and deception, because it arises, not from reason, but only from the most powerful affects."

[3] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 11.27; Curley, *Leviathan*, 63: "this seed of religion having been observed by many, some of those that have observed it have been inclined thereby to nourish, dress, and form it into laws, and to add to it, of their own invention, any opinion of the causes of future events by which they thought they should best be able to govern others, and make unto themselves the greatest use of their powers." See *TTP* Pref (G III6–7/C II 68): "…immense zeal is brought to bear to embellish religion—whether the religion is true or illusory—with ceremony and pomp, so that it will be thought to have greater weight than any other influence, and so that everyone will always worship it with the utmost deference."

[4] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 11.26; Curley, *Leviathan*, 63.

[5] On the relation between superstition and religion in the *TTP*, see Garber, "Anthropomorphism."

Preface to the *TTP*.[6] Once more Spinoza's views resonate with Hobbes's *Leviathan*, where "taking of things casual for prognostics" was deemed the third "natural seed" of religion.[7] But the role of fear—and hope—is downplayed compared to the central role attributed to fear in the Preface to the *TTP*, since in the Appendix to E1 the passions are not mentioned in Spinoza's conjectural genealogy of the phenomenon of religion. There the origin of religion is explained in a manner that is totally original, even compared to Hobbes. Religion remains a natural and hence universal phenomenon, but it is taken to derive not from a passion, such as fear, but directly from ignorance of causes. This differs from Hobbes's thesis, according to which ignorance can generate religion only to the extent that it causes anxiety and is combined with fear.[8] In the Appendix to E1, on the other hand, ignorance acts on its own, as it were, being responsible for rudimentary theological convictions devoid of emotional content. It is obvious, though, that this change leaves intact the view according to which the universality of the phenomenon of religion is not an indication of its truth.

Spinoza thus deviates from Hobbes and proposes a new theory about the origin of the phenomenon of religion and superstition. While the reasons for this divergence are inevitably hypothetical, in what follows I suggest that they should be sought in the enormous expansion of the phenomena which, in the *Ethics*, are said to follow out of the anthropocentric finalism Spinoza outlines in the Appendix to E1.

3. Finalism in the *Ethics*

In the Appendix to E1, Spinoza identifies finalism as the origin of all the prejudices against the metaphysics presented earlier in Part 1, and sets himself three goals:

1. To find out why the majority of mankind is prone to a prejudice for final causes;
2. To demonstrate its falsity;
3. To demonstrate how, from this prejudice, other prejudices have arisen [see E1app (G II 78/C I 440)].

[6] *TTP* pref (G III 5/C II 66): "If, while fear makes them turn this way and that, they see something happen which reminds them of some past good or evil, they think it portends either a fortunate or an unfortunate outcome; they call it a favorable or unfavorable omen, even though it may deceive them a hundred times."

[7] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 12:11; Curley, *Leviathan*, 66: "In these four things, opinion of ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotion towards what men fear, and taking of things casual for prognostics, consisteth the natural seed of *religion*."

[8] See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 12:6; Curley, *Leviathan*, 64, quoted above.

The first two points pivot on the origin of the prejudice of finalism and on the main theological tenets derived from this prejudice. Spinoza explains how the belief in one or more deities who have arranged the world for man's advantage was born from the ignorance of causes combined with the privilege accorded to the usefulness that things can bring to men. The third point, instead, focuses on a broad spectrum of non-theological notions, which can again be traced to anthropocentric finalism. These notions are set out in two somewhat different versions, with two somewhat different lists of the prejudices that arise from anthropocentric finalism. The first version is given in connection with the third point above:

> Finally (I shall show) how, from this [i.e. from the prejudice for final causes], prejudices have arisen concerning *good* and *evil*, *merit* and *sin*, *praise* and *blame*, *order* and *confusion*, *beauty* and *ugliness*, and other things of this kind. [E1app (G II 78/C I 440)]

As regards these notions, the prejudice consists in the projection of our subjective perceptions onto things themselves. Without the finalist prejudice, people would simply say that a thing was "pleasing" or "favorable." But instead, anthropocentric finalism leads us to consider a thing as "good" in itself, or rather it leads us to confuse the pleasure a person has in perceiving such a thing with an intrinsic property of the thing itself. This projection of subjective perceptions onto the things themselves can *only* be explained by the silent working of the anthropocentric prejudice for final causes. Furthermore, given the anthropocentric finalistic prejudice, such notions are *necessarily* produced.

In other words, anthropocentric finalism is not only the necessary cause, but also the sufficient cause of these notions, as Spinoza makes clear when introducing a second enumeration of the notions derived from finalism:

> After men persuaded themselves that everything that happens, happens on their account, they *had to judge* [emphasis mine] that what is most important in each thing is what is most useful to them, and to rate as most excellent all those things by which they were most pleased. Hence, they *had to form these notions* [emphasis mine], by which they explained natural things: *good*, *evil*, *order*, *confusion*, *warm*, *cold*, *beauty*, *ugliness*. And because they think themselves free, those notions have arisen: *praise* and *blame*, *sin* and *merit*. [E1app (G II 81/C I 444)]

Here a pair of notions has been added to the enumeration of notions from the first list, quoted above: heat and cold. While the first list might have given the impression that anthropocentric finalism was responsible only for the origin of values ("*good* and *evil*, *merit* and *sin*," etc.), we now know that not only values

originate in finalism, but also other notions apparently devoid of evaluative connotations, such as heat and cold.

In this case too, the error induced by anthropocentric finalism lies in construing these notions as properties of the things, instead of recognizing their subjective character:

> The other notions are also nothing but modes of imagining, by which the imagination is variously affected; and yet the ignorant consider them the chief attributes of things, because, as we have already said, they believe all things have been made for their sake, and call the nature of a thing good or evil, sound or rotten and corrupt, as they are affected by it. [E1app (II 82/C I 445)]

Spinoza then goes into detail about these notions, analyzing the origin of each. Things are deemed beautiful "if the motion the nerves receive from objects presented through the eyes is conducive to health" [E1app (II 82/C I 445)] and ugly if the motion communicated to the nerves produces a contrary effect. Again, values are at stake, this time aesthetic values, all being considered reactions of the subject to pleasant or unpleasant perceptions provoked by the environment. However, the list goes on, even dwelling on simply descriptive characteristics, that is, on the objectivization of perceptions that are neither pleasant nor unpleasant:

> Those which move the sense through the nose, they call pleasant-smelling or stinking; through the tongue, sweet or bitter, tasty or tasteless; through touch, hard or soft, rough or smooth, etc. […] All of these things show sufficiently that each one has judged things according to the disposition of his brain; or rather, *has accepted affections of the imagination as things*." [E1app (II 82/C I 445), emphasis mine]

The second list of the notions deriving from anthropocentric finalism show how *all* objectivization of sensations, whether they are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, is to be laid at the door of anthropocentric finalism. Without finalism the man in the street touching snow would say: I feel cold when I touch snow. The scientist, on his part, would say that the temperature of snow is zero degrees. Instead, those who reason in line with anthropocentric finalism think and say that snow *is* cold. Such people, indeed, believe that the sensations one feels in contact with things are the end to which such things tend, and for this reason consider that the effect they produce is to be attributed to an intrinsic characteristic of the things, similar to the sensation that they provoke in the person.

This third point discussed in the Appendix (the prejudices concerning good and evil, etc.) differs from the first two (the theology derived from the prejudice toward final causes) in that the notions of good and evil, and so forth, do not

necessarily depend on the theological or religious implications of anthropocentric finalism. Indeed, men do not necessarily have to hold that there exists a God who created nature for the benefit of mankind in order to call the nature of a thing "good or evil, sound or rotten and corrupt, as they are affected by it." It is enough to stop at the first level of inference, namely the conviction that the final cause behind the operation of nature is man. In effect, the presentation of the third point links the prejudices discussed here *directly* to anthropocentric finalism, without having to pass necessarily through theology or religion:

> After men persuaded themselves that everything that happens, happens on their account, they had to judge that what is most important in each thing is what is most useful to them, and to rate as most excellent all those things by which they were most pleased. Hence, they had to form these notions, by which they explained natural things: *good*, *evil*, *order*, *confusion*, *warm*, *cold*, *beauty*, *ugliness*. And because they think themselves free, those notions have arisen: *praise* and *blame*, *sin* and *merit*. [E1app (G II 81/C I 444)]

Based on this it is possible to draw an initial, provisional conclusion. In the *Ethics* the consequences of anthropocentric finalism extend to the entire prescientific vision of the world. It is not hard to establish which vision of the world anthropocentric finalism is held responsible for: a vision of the world in which the perceived characteristics are similar to those actually possessed by objects. It is, in a word, the pre-Cartesian conception of the world: the qualitative physics of Aristotelian origin.

4. Spinoza against Aristotle

In an essay published in 1999, Don Garrett suggested that not only is Aristotle excluded from Spinoza's criticism of finalism, but even that Spinoza's view converges with Aristotelian finalism.[9] There are essentially two reasons why Spinoza would spare Aristotle from criticism:

[9] Garrett, "Teleology." Carriero, "Final Causality", has contested Garrett's thesis, concentrating his analysis on a comparison between Spinoza and Thomas Aquinas. More recently Sangiacomo, "Polemical Target," has supported Garrett's reading, proposing Heereboord rather than Aristotle as the polemical target of Spinoza's critique of finalism.

The debate on Spinoza's attitude to finalism is more wide-ranging than the specific question of his attitude to Aristotelian finalism. However, this point is crucial for correctly determining Spinoza's attitude. Indeed, if Aristotle were not the target of Spinoza's criticism, this would leave open the possibility of a meeting point between Spinoza's philosophy of nature and the unconscious internal finalism of Aristotelian natural philosophy. In this paper I am not concerned with teleology in the domain of human action. The opposing positions advanced by Johnathan Bennett and Edwin Curley on this topic provide a new perspective on the debate concerning Spinoza's criticism of finalism. See Bennett, *A Study*, and Curley, "On Bennett's Spinoza."

1. Aristotle's finalism does not imply the existence of a God who consciously imposes ends to nature.
2. Aristotle's finalism is not anthropocentric.

What is striking about Garrett's analysis and those who have appraised and discussed it is that the third point in Spinoza's analysis of finalistic prejudice that we discussed above is never taken into consideration. In this way, the literature has failed to address Spinoza's theory that anthropocentric finalism has not only theological but also epistemological consequences. When we turn our attention to Spinoza's third point—the consequences of finalism for notions like good and evil, hot and cold—it is easy to see that Garrett's first reason for excluding Aristotelian finalism from Spinoza's criticism is irrelevant to these cases. This leads us to consider the non-anthropocentric character of Aristotelian finalism, i.e. the second reason Garrett advances for excluding Aristotelian finalism from Spinoza's criticism.

In addressing this question, it is useful to consider the allusions to Aristotle in Spinoza's criticism of anthropocentric finalism. In the Appendix to E1 there are, in fact, two clear allusions to Aristotelian texts. The first is inserted after the concluding moment of Spinoza's reconstruction of the prejudice for final causes, where the supporter of finalism, unable to explain the natural events that harm men, appeals to the unknowability of God's purposes. There Spinoza notes that mathematics has provided a criterion of truth independent of finalism:

> This alone, of course, would have caused the truth to be hidden from the human race to eternity, if Mathematics, which is concerned not with ends, but only with the essences and properties of figures, had not shown men another standard of truth. [E1app (G II 79/C I 441)]

This is a clear reference to Aristotle:

> [E]verything that in itself and by its own nature is good is an end, and a cause in the sense that for its sake the other things both come to be and are. […] This is why in mathematics nothing is proved by means of this kind of cause, nor is there any demonstration of this kind—'because it is better, or worse'; indeed no one even mentions anything of the kind. [Aristotle, *Metaphysics* B 996a29–30][10]

In this text, what is fundamental is Aristotle's affirmation that, unlike sciences which draw on final causes, mathematics does not use "any demonstration of this kind—'because it is better, or worse'." According to Aristotle, finalism implies an

[10] Translations of Aristotle are taken from Aristotle, *Complete Works*.

appeal to value, that is a reference to the "better or worse," as emerges clearly in Book II of the *Physics*, the fundamental text of Aristotelian doctrine on natural finalism: "For not every stage that is last claims to be an end, but only that which is best."[11] The end of the individual species is the attainment of its own nature, but the attainment of its own nature is not merely the last stage in any process—otherwise we could say that death is the end, or goal, of life—but the perfection of the nature of each individual species: the healthy adult attains the end to which human nature tends, not the sick man or the deceased.

Emblematic of this is Aristotle's refutation of those who criticize the finalist interpretation of nature by referring to monstrosities, irregular events that occur rarely and conflict with the perfection toward which nature is said to tend. Aristotle makes ingenious use of the objection raised against purpose in nature drawn from the "mistakes" present in it to actually *strengthen* the finalist interpretation. Indeed, he argues, only where there is an end can there be a mistake, so that those who speak of mistakes in nature are actually assuming the finalism they wish to dispute:

> Now mistakes occur even in the operations of art. […] Hence clearly mistakes are possible in the operations of nature also. If then in art there are cases in which what is rightly produced serves a purpose, and *if where mistakes occur there was a purpose in what was attempted, only it was not attained*, so must it be also in natural products, and monstrosities will be failures in the purposive effort. [*Physics* II (B), 8, 199a35–b5, emphasis mine]

Aristotle's stroke of genius is perfectly mirrored by Spinoza: it is finality uncritically assumed that has generated the notions of order and disorder, perfection and imperfection, good and evil in nature. And it is self-evident that purpose alone can explain these notions that it itself has generated. If instead we deny purpose, those same notions that the purposiveness was called upon to explain disappear with it, as does the possibility of speaking of ordered and disordered phenomena, good and bad phenomena and mistakes of nature. Thus, the values attributed to things—good and evil; order and disorder—as well as the secondary qualities—heat and cold—disappear along with the mistake that generated them. This is how, in the Appendix to E1 Spinoza eliminates the classic problem of theodicy, denying legitimacy to the notions of 'evil' or 'confusion' in nature. It is hardly necessary to stress that the "whole order of nature" Spinoza refers to (E2p7s), as tantamount to the connection of necessary and efficient causes, is devoid of any value judgment, so that it does not allow its opposite, i.e. the

[11] Aristotle, *Physics* II (B), 2, 194a30–2. See also *De caelo* II, 5, 288a3: "Nature always follows the best course possible"; *De partibus animalium* II, 13, 658a8: "Nature does nothing in vain." Cf. Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology*, 90–3.

"disorder of nature," namely the notion that, following Aristotle, supports finalism in nature.

This first reference to an Aristotelian text supports Spinoza's conviction that in judging natural events, Aristotelian finalism cannot do without the conception of value which Spinoza intends to dispel. The second textual reference to Aristotle then leads us to address the second and more important reason some adduce to support the claim that Spinoza's criticism of finalism does not extend to Aristotelian finalism, that is to say that unlike the finalism Spinoza criticizes, Aristotelian finalism is not anthropocentric. At issue here is a celebrated motto of Aristotelian origin which the whole later tradition freely drew upon: "Nature does nothing in vain." Spinoza does not merely quote this famous motto, but also adds a gloss on it in brackets: "i.e. nothing which is not of use to men": "But while they sought to show that nature does nothing in vain (i.e. nothing which is not of use to men), they seem to have shown only that nature and the Gods are as mad as men" [E1app (G II 79/C I 441)]. In order to determine whether Spinoza included Aristotle in his criticism of anthropocentric finalism, it is important to understand whether the addition made in brackets commenting on the Aristotelian adage was intended to exclude or include Aristotle himself. Spinoza may indeed have wished to clarify the anthropocentric sense of the motto for the purpose of *excluding* from his criticism those who—like Aristotle—did not utilize a finalism of this kind. In actual fact the phrase, complete with the words in brackets, reproposes a version of the adage present in Aristotle's *Politics*:

> We may infer that, after the birth of animals, plants exist for their sake, and that the other animals exist for the sake of man, the tame for use and food, the wild, if not all at least the greater part of them, for food, and for the provision of clothing and various instruments. *Now if nature makes nothing incomplete, and nothing in vain, the inference must be that she has made all animals for the sake of man.* [*Politics* I, 8, 1256b, emphasis mine]

In his parenthetical addition to the Aristotelian motto, Spinoza alluded to one of the few places in which the adage is presented by Aristotle himself in a clearly anthropocentric version, suggesting that *all* the places in which the motto appears are to be interpreted in the light of this text. After all, we cannot ignore that this text had become a decisive reference for upholding anthropocentrism on Aristotle's authority.[12]

There is, however, another possible reading, which is the simplest and hence preferable: that Spinoza, using an argumentative strategy that he often used, does not look for the way people actually reason to arrive at the prejudices he is

[12] See Coimbra, *Commentarii*, 430: "Est etiam totius corporeae naturae universalis finis, homo, ut post Platonem asseruit Arist. Politic. 5." See also the texts quoted below, note 19.

challenging, but, instead, he seeks the premises that those prejudices presuppose, even if people are not necessarily conscious of them. In his account of the origin of the objectivization of perceptions—heat, cold, sweet, bitter, smooth, rough—Spinoza certainly does not intend to advance the implausible view that a theory of anthropocentric finalism *consciously* precedes ordinary talk about the qualities of things. Instead, much more reasonably, he assumes that an *unconscious* anthropocentric finalistic prejudice is at work when we attribute to things themselves the qualities perceived through sensation. We should recall that Spinoza believed that without this prejudice the objectivization of perceptions would not take place. Actually, and despite the above-quoted passage from the *Politics*, there is no doubt that Aristotelian finalism is presented as non-anthropocentric, especially in Book II of the *Physics*. Here finalism in natural events is widely discussed and the final cause is identified as the essence, or form, of natural beings: "And since nature is twofold, the matter and the form, of which the latter is the end, and since all the rest is for the sake of the end, the form must be the cause in the sense of that for the sake of which."[13] Nevertheless, Spinoza's theory is that if anthropocentric finalism were not silently at work, the theory of the resemblance between the properties of things and the perceptions would never have emerged, and nor would the value judgments relating to natural events. In this case the passage in the *Politics* reveals what, most of the time, remains concealed from Aristotle himself.

If this analysis is correct, it allows us to identify Spinoza's underlying theory, something which gets entirely lost in the readings that suggest a convergence between Spinoza's views and Aristotelian finalism. The theoretical gauntlet cast down in the Appendix E1 consists precisely in maintaining that *all* finalism is by its nature anthropocentric: "Nature does nothing in vain, i.e. nothing not of use to men." Without brackets.

5. A Technique of Refutation

In the Appendix to E1 Spinoza traces not only all forms of religion back to anthropocentric finalism, but also all the theories that attribute to the external world characteristics similar to those perceived. Spinoza's critical fire brings down not only theories that explicitly assume an anthropocentric finalism and those that assume an apparently non-anthropocentric finalism, but also theories that appear to have nothing at all to do with finalism, such as those that maintain that things themselves are hot or cold, or hard or soft.

[13] Aristotle, *Physics* II, 199a32–3. See Judson "Aristotelian Teleology," and Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology*, 3–5 and 229–36 for an insightful analysis of the passage from *Politics* I, 8, 1256b. For the opposite view see Sedley, "Aristotle's Teleology."

The technique used to identify the targets of criticism of anthropocentric finalism is typical of Spinoza and had already been extensively employed in the *Cogitata metaphysica*. There it was a question of demonstrating that all scholastic theology interprets the divine nature on a human analogy, and is thus incapable of comprehending the infinity and absolute simplicity of the divine nature. While the theologians Spinoza targeted may have explicitly declared the opposite, a close reading of their views revealed that they attributed to God duration and quantity, that they distinguished the essence of God from his existence and his power, that they limited divine power and omniscience, and that they distinguished the intellect of God and his will. Only a few marginal thinkers—the Dutch scholastics, Burgersdijck, Heereboord, and, above all, the Socinians—explicitly accepted the postulates that were actually at work in all scholastic theology.[14]

Many years ago, Dunin-Borkowski stressed the fact that only the fringe group of the Socinians had truly upheld the postulates stigmatized by Spinoza. Dunin-Borkowski was surprised by the fact that Spinoza took pains to refute such a marginal group.[15] In actual fact, Spinoza's intention was more subtle: to demonstrate how the "coarse (*crassi*) Socinians"[16] were—in Hegelian manner—"true" to the meaning of scholastic theology. The Socinians, he thought, accepted openly the concealed assumptions of all theology: they frankly state that God is finite, that his power is distinct from his essence, that God is extended and separate from the world, that he does not foresee future contingencies, and that eternity is an indefinite duration. On the contrary, the respectable scholastic theologians state that God is infinite, absolutely simple, devoid of all quantity and duration. But then—with their theories about omnipresence, immensity, and divine

[14] At the time in which Spinoza was writing, the diaspora of the Polish Brethren following the expulsion decree issued in 1658 had led a large number of members of this religious group to settle in the Netherlands. The Polish Brethren in diaspora took the name of Socinians. Their settlement in the Netherlands was favored by the relations they had established with the Arminians. Cf. Wilbur, *Unitarianism* I, 467ff. and Kühler, *Socinianisme*. Between 1665 and 1668 the collection of Socinian writings titled *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* was published in Amsterdam with a fictitious date, post annum 1656, and a fictitious place of publication, Irenopoli—an evident homage to Amsterdam. Cf. Vercruysse, "Bibliotheca." However, already in 1630, the first comprehensive presentation of Socinian theology was published by Crell, *De Deo*, printed together with Völkel's *De vera religione*. This work was then republished in Amsterdam in 1642 by the publisher Blaeu. Crell's *De Deo* develops more widely all the ideas related to rational theology that had only been sketched out by Fausto Sozzini. On Spinoza and the Socinians see Mignini, "Spinoza e i sociniani."

[15] Dunin-Borkowski, *Spinoza*, 120–4, 129–35, 353–8.

[16] Ep 21, Spinoza to Blijenbergh, 28 January 1665 (G IV 132/C I 381), my translation. Spinoza refers to the early Socinians' scriptural exegesis. Faithful to the literal sense of Scripture, the early followers of Fausto Sozzini identified its literal meaning as the truth. Iohann Völkel's *De vera religione* remains a clear example of the exegesis of the early Socinians. See Kühler, *Socinianisme*. On the other hand, Crell's *De Deo* can rightly be considered the text that marked a turning point in the relationship between reason and Scripture: according to its perspective, reason does not limit itself to interpreting Scripture, but autonomously produces a system of rational theology. See Salatowsky, *Die Philosophie*, and Torzini, *Introduzione* to Crell, *De Deo*.

omnipotence—they clearly attribute quantity to God, and hold that his attributes are distinguishable from his essence. In this way, they consider God finite.

To give some examples: while the most respectable theologians "seem" only "to distinguish between God's essence and his power, […] *others* have also asserted the same thing more openly, when they say that God is everywhere through his power, but not through his essence" [*CM* 3 (G I 255/C I 320–1); emphasis mine]. Concerning the intellect of God, that is, the fact that "his ideas are not determined, as ours are, by objects placed outside God," "*some people* have not taken sufficient note of this" and as a consequence:

> …they have fallen into very great errors, and have maintained that there is matter outside God, coeternal with him, existing of itself […]. And then *some* have maintained that things are, of their own nature, either necessary, or impossible, or contingent, and that God, therefore, also knows them as contingent, and is completely ignorant of whether they exist or not. [*CM* 7 (G I 261/C I 327); emphasis mine]

The "others," those who openly distinguish essence and power in God, or the "some" who maintained that there is a matter outside God existing of itself and that God is ignorant of contingent things are Fausto Sozzini, Johann Crell, and the Arminian Episcopius. Crell in the *De Deo* explicitly states that God is finite, extended, has duration, that in him power and essence are separate. The Socinians explicitly state that there is matter outside God existing of itself, and that God is ignorant of future free actions of men, etc.[17] It is in the Socinians' works that the "truth" of all scholastic theology surfaces.

These texts from the *CM* inaugurate Spinoza's strategy for the refutation of the theologies that came before him. Bearing this in mind can also help us to understand the criticism of theological theses developed in the first two points of his attack on anthropocentric finalism. In the identification of the consequences of anthropocentric finalism in theology, Spinoza is seeking out the implicit hidden assumptions that sometimes come out into the open, in some cases through marginal writers who dare to declare explicitly what is at work in theology taken more generally. It is the same strategy that led Spinoza to identify the anthropocentrism of Aristotle's finalism, which his followers, such as Suárez and Heereboord have brought to full light.

[17] Sozzini, *Fragmentum cathechismi Prioris F.S.S.* in Sozzini, *Opera* I, 685: the Holy Scriptures "suadere […] videntur, ipsius Dei substantiam non ubique pariter praesentem esse, et sic eam non esse immensam nec infinitam, quamvis ubique tamen sua virtute et providentia sit ipse Deus praesens." Cf. Crell, *De Deo*, ch. XXVII, *De Magnitudine, Immensitate, et Omnipraesentia Dei*, 267–76. Cf. Episcopius, *Institutiones*, 287b. Cf. also Völkel, *De vera religione*, 6: "Deus *ex nihilo* omnia fecisse dicitur, quia ea creavit ex materia informi […]"; Sozzini, *Praelectiones theologicae*, in *Opera* I, 545b: "Deus omnia scit, quae sua natura scibilia sunt […] verum quaedam sunt, quae Deus scire nulla ratione dici potest […]." For a broader discussion of this topic see my edition of Spinoza, *Principi*, 144–53, notes.

6. Conclusion

Commentators starting with Harry Wolfson have attempted to identify the targets of Spinoza's criticism, the theologians who sustained the theological postulates that he thinks necessarily derive from anthropocentric finalism.[18] The figures that have emerged are those who were the targets of his criticism in the *Cogitata metaphysica*. They fall into two groups: the Dutch scholastics along with their source, Francisco Suárez, and the Socinians, including especially the leading exponent of their rational theology, Johann Crell. Indeed, since they explicitly sustained an anthropocentric finalism, Suárez and Crell truly embodies Spinoza's polemic target.[19]

The marginality of the former and the modernity of the latter seems at odds with the solemn *incipit* of the finalist critique at the beginning of the appendix to E1, which, as we have seen, traces the entire edifice of religious beliefs back to such finalism, and consistently attributes this mistake and its consequences to the entire human race: "*Men* [*Homines*] had to infer that there was a ruler or a number of rulers of nature" [E1app (G II 79/C I 441)]. But this seeming incongruity is just a feature of the polemic strategy which Spinoza constantly deploys. Certain marginal and modern writers openly adopt the premises at work, though hidden, in theology as a whole, at work even in the kind of theology that does not explicitly resort to anthropocentrism but, for example, merely appeals to a divine plan without which it would be impossible to explain complex phenomena such as "the structure of the human body" [E1app (G II 81/C I 443)].

And with this we can finally return to the question of miracles. The very same argumentative technique is used in chapter 6 of the *TTP*, in the chapter on miracles with which we began this essay. In that chapter, Spinoza maintains that those who believe in miracles see God and nature as two distinct powers independent of each other: "They imagine two powers numerically distinct from one another, the power of God and the power of natural things" [*TTP* 6 (G III 81/C II 153)]. Only this hidden assumption can explain their conviction that God works upon nature by occasionally altering its laws. So who did

[18] Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, 422–40, who already underscored certain features of Heereboord's writings.

[19] Crell, *De Deo*, ch. III, *Ex mundi huius opificio Deum esse demonstratur*, 13: "Utilitatem Solis longe maximam, ad quam natura comparatus est, qui non cernit, eum caecum esse oportet: quamquam et is, qui eam non videt, sentit tamen. Ita enim a natura factus est, ut et lumen animantibus, ac praecipue homini, ad variarum rerum cognitionem, atque ad actiones operaque necessaria praebeat"; 21: "Ex his vero alia iterum emergit utilitas, qua plantae tum animalium, tum vero maxime hominis vitae, qui rerum terrenarum omnium dominus est et finis quidam, serviunt." Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, *Disputatio* 24, 2, 10: "Deus […] herbas et animalia condidit propter hominem." Both Suárez's text and Crell's echo the above-quoted passage from Aristotle's *Politics*. Also Episcopius, *Institutiones* 9: "Serviunt singula singulis, uni [homini] omnia." Landucci, *I filosofi*, 83–95 adds Marin Mersenne and Jean Silhon.

Spinoza have in mind? Probably nobody in particular, but in this case as well, Spinoza identified the theoretical premise at work in the belief in miracles, whether the supporters of the idea of the divine power to alter the laws of nature were aware of it or not.

Using the same technique, in the Appendix to E1, the cause of religion is traced back to a world-view entirely dominated by anthropocentric finalism, in contrast to the *TTP*, where the origin of religion is only fear. Explanations for this change can only be hypothetical. My view is that, between the drafting of the *TTP* and the completion of the *Ethics*, Spinoza became convinced that it was possible to include the non-philosophical origin of religion among the many consequences of one single fundamental error, in that way subscribing to a sort of principle of economy in the genesis of mistakes: "*All* the prejudices I here undertake to expose depend on this one: that men commonly suppose that all natural things act, as men do, on account of an end" [E app (G II 78/C I 439); emphasis mine]. The belief in one or more gods similar to man now has the same origin as the view that things literally have properties similar to the sensations stimulated in us when these things act on us. As a consequence, Spinoza comes to downplay the role of fear in relation to the origin of religion or superstition, while the belief in miracles appears to be only one of the several consequences of that ignorance which fostered the finalistic interpretation of nature. Moreover, anthropocentric finalism, for Spinoza the root of all prejudices, is seen as a spontaneous expression of the relationship between the human mind and the world.

As a result, at least one of the errors with which the Jews were burdened in the *TTP*—the belief in miracles and ethnocentric finalism—has been equably distributed over the entire human race and its weaknesses.

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PART V

REVELATION, REASON, AND SALVATION

11
Spinoza's Views on Prophecy and the Prophets Revisited

Ursula Renz and Philip Waldner

1. Introduction

Spinoza famously opens his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (*TTP*) with one chapter on prophecy and one chapter on the prophets. This is not an obvious beginning, considering the political nature of the treatise. A brief look at the subtitle of the *TTP*—in which the author promises to show not merely "that freedom of philosophizing can be granted without harming peace and piety of the republic" but also that "it cannot be denied without destroying its peace and piety" [*TTP* (G III 3/C II 65), translation ours]—does not explain the particular function of this inquiry into the nature of prophecy and the prophet. This raises an obvious question: what role do these chapters play in Spinoza's political thinking?

Following a frequent—call it: *secularist*—reading of the *TTP*, an important step for securing freedom of philosophizing consists in the disempowerment of religious authorities. This reading—which is widespread in a variety of different interpretations—focuses, firstly, on the distinction between theology and philosophy and, secondly, on the separation of the state and its government from religious institutions and affairs.[1] Given this reading, it may seem natural that Spinoza starts his *TTP* with the analysis of prophecy and the prophet, as biblical prophets are often referred to as epistemic authorities and sources of knowledge and truth. By discussing the nature of prophecy and the prophet and by denying prophetic speech any presumption of truth, one might suppose, Spinoza sought to undermine the prophet's epistemic authority. Accordingly, Spinoza is taken to display an entirely dismissive attitude toward the prophets.[2]

[1] We take this view to be predominant in a variety of very different approaches. On the one hand it serves as a guiding principle for Straussian hermeneutics (see Strauss, "How to Study"), on the other hand it is present in "liberal" interpretations such as the one proposed by Smith, *Liberalism*, as well as in reconstructions of Spinoza as a key figure in the Enlightenment (see Israel, *Radical Enlightenment* and *Democratic Enlightenment*; Nadler, *Forged in Hell*). A more recent example would be the study by Saar, *Immanenz*, which elaborates on Spinoza's critique of religious authorities within a theory-of-power framework.

[2] See especially Klever, "Vindication," 210; Smith, *Liberalism*, 89–95; Frankel, "Liberal Theology," 291–3; Rutherford, "Conception of Law," 157; Saar, *Immanenz*, 22–6; and Wulf, "Religionsverständnis," 78, among many others.

To our mind, this reading is only partially satisfying. By highlighting Spinoza's critique of the destructive aspects of religion, indeed eloquently expressed in the polemics against superstitious belief, the secularist reading falls short of taking account of the social functions Spinoza attributes to religion. As a consequence, it misses the extent to which religious phenomena are portrayed as indispensable to human life in certain contexts, however ruinous they might be when they turn into superstition. Although we agree with the secularist reading that Spinoza criticizes a superstitious understanding of religious beliefs, we argue that this does not exhaust his views of religion. If Spinoza discusses religious phenomena, he does so on the basis of an *anthropological* or *social-theoretical* analysis. This has not remained unnoticed in Spinoza scholarship.[3] But, we conclude further, the analysis of religious phenomena matters for Spinoza's anthropology as well as for his normative views on politics and social life.

It is true that Spinoza criticizes many religious claims, advocates a separation of the state from religion, and demands that religions must be subjected to the state with respect to institutional and legal issues, while giving it wide liberty with respect to religious contents and beliefs. However, he neither considers religion as generally bad or irrational, nor does he, conversely, assume that politics may operate on an entirely rational basis.[4] Consider for example the warning Spinoza articulates in the beginning of the *Tractatus politicus* (*TP*). There, Spinoza explicitly says that, as politician or theoretician, one should not expect the multitude to ever be induced to live entirely according to the prescriptions of reason.[5] We thus suppose that in many respects, Spinoza's views on religion are guided as much by the anthropological insight into the emotional roots of man's political life as by his views on the nature and the lack of epistemic justification of traditional religious doctrines. If this is true, the point of the critical discussion of religion in the *TTP* is also to demonstrate how, from an anthropological standpoint, religious practices may be comprehended as contributing to the constitution of societies, which comprehension allows for evaluating religion upon other than merely epistemic criteria, for example upon political and social outcomes.

In this chapter, we aim to defend this social-anthropological perspective on the *TTP* by elaborating on Spinoza views on prophecy and the prophets. Generally, we shall show that although Spinoza explains the phenomena of prophecy and the prophet in naturalist terms, he does not deny them any practical legitimacy. Rather his approach allows for the view that prophecy has—or at least *had* in

[3] See Bartuschat, *Theorie des Menschen*, who reconstructs Spinoza's political theory from an anthropological perspective, but does not include Spinoza's analysis of religious phenomena.

[4] See Rosenthal, "Miracles," 231–2.

[5] See *TP* 1.5 (G III 275/C II 506): "So people who persuade themselves that a multitude, which may be divided over public affairs, can be induced to live only according to the prescriptions of reason, those people are dreaming of the golden age of the Poets [*ita ut, qui sibi persuadent posse multitudinem vel qui publicis negotiis distrahuntur, induci, ut ex solo rationis praescripto vivant, saeculum poëtarum aureum seu fabulam somnient*]."

premodern, prescientific times—an important role to play in human life and especially politics. More particularly, we suggest reading Spinoza's discussion of the prophets and prophecy as responding to a double concern with moral guidance and political leadership in situations where knowledge and understanding are simply not available. Thus, the view we ascribe to Spinoza says that in such situations prophecy had an important role to play—and yet, given the nature of this role, whether it played it to the people's advantage or disadvantage, is dependent on the trustworthiness of the prophet.

We will proceed as follows. We begin in §2 by revisiting Spinoza's definition of prophecy given in *TTP* 1. We shall argue that in contrast to what recent secularist readings claim, Spinoza embraces the traditional notion of prophecy in terms of God's revelation, even though he does not consider divine revelation as transgressing the boundaries of natural knowledge.

In §3 we examine Spinoza's understanding of the psychology of prophecy by taking a closer look at the concept of the imagination as it is established in the *Ethics* and by considering how Spinoza appeals to this concept in his account of prophecy and the prophet. We shall discern three ways in which Spinoza's views on prophecy rely on his theory of the imagination: (1) it explains the prophet's specific mental constitution, (2) it explains the communicative or social dimension of prophetic speech, and (3) it accounts for the certainty the prophet takes his views to have. Altogether, we will argue that the ideas on the imagination have an important role to play in Spinoza's account of prophecy that is not reducible to the epistemological critique of prophetic views.

In §4 we discuss the concept of prophetic certainty. Drawing on a comparison with Maimonides' approach, we will argue that Spinoza's views on both prophecy in general and prophetic certainty in particular depart essentially from those established by Maimonides. Remarkably, although both approaches may be taken to provide naturalist definitions of prophecy, they do so from a wholly different perspective. Being a person of exceeding intellectual capacities, the Maimonidean prophet is special in virtue of his knowledge and understanding. Spinoza's prophet, in contrast, lacks this sort of epistemic excellence, and yet, provided he has moral certainty, he may nevertheless be a trustworthy leader.

2. Definitional and Methodological Issues

In the beginning of *TTP* 1, Spinoza defines prophecy and the prophet as follows:

> Prophecy, *or* Revelation, is the certain knowledge of some matter which God has revealed to men. And a Prophet is one who interprets God's revelations to those who cannot have certain knowledge of them, and who therefore can only embrace what has been revealed by simple faith. [*TTP* 1 (G III 15/C II 76)]

These definitions are in many ways striking. First, it may come as a surprise that prophecy and revelation are treated as synonymous here. Yet when Spinoza writes: "Prophecy, *or* Revelation" [*Prophetia sive revelatio*], he indicates that he is employing a broad notion of prophecy that includes phenomena that are not always treated as such. In this vein, Susan James has recently argued that Spinoza's *TTP* can be contextualized within the tradition of Calvinist theology, where the Old and the New Testament were taken to form "a unified narrative" and a source of divine revelation.[6] If this is at the background here, then we can read Spinoza's identification of prophecy with revelation to include the canonical Christian texts—and thus Christ—in the subsequent discussion of prophecy and the prophets.[7] Second, although the issue of the prophet is only addressed in the subsequent chapter, Spinoza begins his discussion of prophecy by establishing the definitions of both prophecy and the prophet. Spinoza apparently assumes that no sense can be made of prophecy (or of his explanation of it), unless one has at least a preliminary grasp of the prophet as well.

This assumption leads to a third feature. Note that the quoted definition endows the prophet with the role of an interpreter, where "interpreting" means "translating divine knowledge to a non-learned audience" or "conveying to others what God reveals to oneself." Interestingly, Spinoza operates here on a model of a triangular relation: prophecy is not to be reduced to the prophet's insight by revelation, but it involves communication of this insight to others, and this essentially. Thus, for Spinoza the act of communication, i.e. the prophet's translation of revelation to the people, is a constitutive part of the phenomena referred to as prophecy.[8]

These points are characteristic of Spinoza's overall account of prophecy. Due to its wide scope, Spinoza's notion of prophecy is applicable to a variety of phenomena, and so must be any theory that takes this notion as its conceptual basis. Moreover, the theoretical connection between the chapters on prophecy and the prophet suggests that, despite the decidedly biblical-hermeneutic approach employed, Spinoza's overall intention regarding prophecy is to establish an anthropological or social-theoretical understanding of it, or more to the point: of

[6] See James, *Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*, 38.

[7] There was, as James also argues, another, similar controversy during Spinoza's time relating the question of whether some currently living people could rightfully be called prophets, or whether the notion of prophecy is to be restricted to the cases that occur in the Bible. Notably, whereas with respect to the status of Christian canonical texts Spinoza opts for a broad understanding of prophecy, stating that he focuses on Scripture alone, he avoids taking position regarding the issue of living prophets. See James, *Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*, 40–2 and Curley's footnote in *TTP* 1 (G III 16/C II 78, fn. 5). For an explicitly non-secularist approach that emphasizes the role of Christ for Spinoza's overall ethical project, see Van Cauter, "Another Dialogue."

[8] Note that comprehension of prophesy in these terms does not, on Spinoza's account, presuppose that the prophets were actually in possession of divine truth. It is, in other words, not a statement on the knowledge assumed in prophesy, but on the style of prophetic enunciation. This is also emphasized by Lærke, *Freedom of Philosophizing*, 49f. and 67f.

the phenomenon that was called 'prophecy' in the Bible. This view is corroborated by the emphasis that Spinoza places on the prophet as an interpreter of divine revelation: in discussing prophecy critically, Spinoza's aim is not as much to question the validity or truth of certain aspects of biblical narratives, as to understand the social processes constitutive of the whole phenomenon.[9]

Things however get more complicated, when, in the second paragraph, Spinoza concludes from his definition that "natural knowledge can be called prophecy" as well. Spinoza then equates this with knowledge that "depends only on the knowledge of God," insofar as it is known "by the natural light" [*TTP* 1 (G III 15/C II 76)]. Taking this yet a step further, he then equates this with knowledge that is "common to all men" [*TTP* 1 (G III 15/C II 77)]. Reading this alongside of the basic definition of prophecy as "certain knowledge," Spinoza seems to imply that rational capacities are already involved in divine revelation.[10] This natural knowledge common to all men, he also explains, can rightfully be called "divine," since by understanding how things follow from their nature, we all take part in God's nature.[11]

At first glance, this looks as if Spinoza just wanted to reduce prophecy to natural knowledge and thus sought to naturalize and rationalize the phenomenon. But Spinoza makes it quite clear that while the understanding of prophecy in terms of natural knowledge exhibits its first cause, more needs to be said in order to account for the way in which prophecy is dealt with in the Bible. This shows that Spinoza's treatment of prophecy is generally guided by a double attitude. If considered with regard to its first causes on the one hand, prophecy is possible for the very same reasons that make rational knowledge of God possible. This is why, within his own philosophical framework, prophecy may be analyzed in terms of our knowledge of God. On the other hand, this does not help us comprehend what the Bible as well as the vulgar refer to when calling some bit of knowledge "prophecy." With respect to this received notion of prophecy, therefore, an account of prophecy also needs to explicate the sense in which prophecy was traditionally assumed to extend "beyond the limits of natural knowledge" [*TTP* 1 (G III 15/C II 77)].

These conflicting attitudes pose a difficulty of how to read Spinoza's text in a consistent way.[12] How, one might wonder, can we understand the idea of some knowledge that reaches beyond the limits of natural knowledge in Spinoza's

[9] See Rosenthal, "Hebrews" and "Rhetoric," who emphasizes the exemplary political function of prophecy rather than the validity of its content. For the socially instructive role of the prophet, see Gatens, "Prophet," 4–5.

[10] This is corroborated by a later passage, where Spinoza states that reasoning is required in order to be certain. See *TTP* 2 (G III 30/C II 94).

[11] See *TTP* 1 (G III 15/C II 77): "Nevertheless, we can call natural knowledge divine with as much right as anything else, since God's nature, insofar as we participate in it, and his decrees, as it were, dictate it to us." See also E1p33s2 (G II 74–6/C I 436–9).

[12] As mentioned, for example, by Laux, *Imagination*, 16 and Brantl, "Prophetie," 54–5.

terms? Or, to put it more bluntly: Can we really make sense of the traditional notion of prophecy without undermining the metaphysical and epistemological principles of Spinoza's rationalist philosophy?[13]

In secondary literature, two ways of dealing with this problem may be discerned. Advocating a secularist reading, on the one hand, some say that the traditional notion of prophecy is quoted here merely to convey the view which is then ruled out by Spinoza's proper account. In this vein, Steven Nadler, for example, separates (1) prophecy "properly understood" (consisting in "whatever knowledge" that "causally and cognitively depends on God,"[14] which also includes human knowledge as a special case of this causal dependency), from (2) prophecy as "proclaimed in Scripture" (meaning that prophecy is presented as a non-intellectual affair by Spinoza). The latter, for Nadler, is merely improper talk, as the idea of supernatural knowledge derives from an empty concept that ecclesiastic authorities invoke for their own ends.[15]

Without any doubt, this reading points to a dimension present in the *TTP*. But it does not fully capture Spinoza's strategy at this point. It is true that by characterizing supernatural knowledge as something which "people *call* divine" [*omnes divinam vocant*; emphasis ours], Spinoza indicates that this kind of knowledge might not be genuine knowledge. A few lines later, however, this is picked up by the announcement to "discuss in greater detail the other causes and means by which God reveals to men things which exceed the limits of natural knowledge [*limites naturalis cognitionis excedunt*]—and even those which do not exceed them" [*TTP* 1 (G III 16/C II 78)]. Note that, here, *excedunt* stands in the indicative; Spinoza apparently refrains from using the subjunctive *excedant*, which would underline the merely hypothetical and unreal character of this scenario. He does not say that he discusses revelations *as if* they exceed the limits of natural knowledge, but he treats them as real objects here. This shows that even though at the end of the day there is perhaps no knowledge that reaches beyond the limits of natural knowledge, Spinoza takes the traditional view that it does so as the starting point of his analysis.

We therefore think that the attitude Spinoza displays in the *TTP* toward the religious ideas of the "common people" [*vulgus*] differs from the critical stance he adopts in the *Ethics* regarding erroneous theological doctrines. And this is no accident, we further think, as Spinoza needs the perspective of a common or

[13] Cf. rationalist interpretations of Spinoza, especially those that stress the general ontological feature that everything that is must in principle be explainable. See Della Rocca, *Spinoza* and Renz, *Erklärbarkeit* (*Explainability*).

[14] Nadler, *Forged in Hell*, 68.

[15] See Nadler, *Forged in Hell*, 68: "As Spinoza says, his aim in the *Treatise* is not to examine the nature of prophecy properly understood—something that, it might be said, he does in the *Ethics*—but to consider prophecy as it is portrayed and proclaimed in Scripture, the primary source of latter-day ecclesiastic authority and, consequently, of religious meddling in political affairs."

"vulgar" conception of divine knowledge in order to account for the very phenomenon, as it is reported in the Bible. We thus assume that rather than just dismissing the traditional notion of prophecy as false, Spinoza accepts it in a sense. It may be the case that it does not meet the epistemological standards of his own views, nor does it converge with his metaphysical views, and yet, from a biblical-hermeneutic perspective, we must take it seriously.

Another line of interpretation, therefore, becomes visible by the application of by what may be called a *textual* or *hermeneutic* method of reconstructing Spinoza's arguments.[16] In fact, this reading is hermeneutic in a twofold sense: taking, on the one hand, Spinoza's hermeneutical attitude toward Scripture as a guideline, it, on the other hand, focuses on Spinoza's proper textual strategies, for example by mapping his proper use of words. An instructive instance of this reading may be found in a recent study by Pierre-François Moreau, where it is pointed out that when elaborating on religious phenomena in the first six chapters of the *TTP*, Spinoza accepted the distinction between the natural and the supernatural.[17] This might appear surprising to many, as it may seem to contradict the widespread opinion that Spinoza defended a naturalist understanding of religion in the *TTP*. However, the aim of Moreau's reading, which is not primarily concerned with Spinoza's metaphysical views, is not as much to deny this general interpretive hypothesis, but to account for the subtleties of the textual strategies of the *TTP*. That Spinoza accepted the distinction between the natural and the supernatural is taken to be crucial for his strategy, even though the purpose of such acceptance is merely heuristic, insofar as it may help capture the variety of phenomena in the first place.[18]

This approach indeed fits nicely with Spinoza's manner of proceeding. Consider for instance the explanation he gives for his approaching the phenomenon of prophecy from a biblical-hermeneutical perspective. Before elaborating on the ways in which God may be said to have revealed Himself to the prophets, Spinoza explicitly claims:

> But whatever can be said about these matters must be sought only from Scripture. For what can we say about things exceeding the limits of our intellect beyond what's been handed down to us, either orally or in writing, from the Prophets themselves? And because today, so far as I know, we have no Prophets, our only option is to expound the sacred books left us by the Prophets. [*TTP* 1 (G III 16/C II 78)]

[16] See also Renz, "Review," e1, for a short discussion of such a reading.
[17] See Moreau, *Problèmes*, 120: "Spinoza y accepte, sous bénéfice d'inventaire, la distinction entre naturel et surnaturel."
[18] See Moreau, *Problèmes*, 120–1.

Spinoza's point here is that, as far as prophecy is concerned, reliance on the Bible is not merely optional, but necessary, and this for good reason. Our only means to get a comprehension at all of the meaning of the term 'prophecy' is to rely on what Scripture tells us about it. And this, he alleges, is so just *because* prophecy is claimed to extend beyond the limits of natural knowledge, not despite of it!

All things considered, we therefore think that Moreau's reconstruction provides a more accurate and subtler picture of Spinoza's treatment of prophecy than the secularist reading mentioned before. This said, we nonetheless doubt that it gets to the center of Spinoza's understanding of prophecy. To our mind, that Spinoza accepts the distinction between the natural and the supernatural is not simply due to his hermeneutic reliance on the Bible, but we think that this acceptance is crucial in order to understand how the appeal to prophecy or the prophets is related to the irreducibly social or political aspects of human life. In a nutshell, our position is that the vulgar understanding of prophecy as constituting supernatural knowledge or as conveyed by divine revelation is an essential part of its usefulness for political purposes. We shall elaborate on this in §4 of this chapter. For now, let us conclude this section by emphasizing that if one of Spinoza's aims when writing the *TTP* was to reflect on the social and political role of religious phenomena, then he had to engage with it in a manner that did not explain the term away.

3. Prophecy, Prophets, and the Imagination

Let us now take a closer look at the findings of Spinoza's reading of a few biblical testimonies of prophecy. Summarizing the way in which the cognizing of divine revelation is described in them, he writes:

> If, then, we run through the Sacred books, we will see that everything God revealed to the Prophets was revealed to them either in words [*verbis*], or in visible forms [*figuris*], or in both words and visible forms. The words and the visible forms were either true [*verae*], and outside the imagination of the Prophet [*extra imaginationem prophetae*] who heard or saw them, or else imaginary [*imaginariae*], occurring because the imagination of the Prophet was so disposed, even while he was awake, that he clearly seemed to himself to hear words or to see something. [*TTP* 1 (G III 17/C II 79)]

Spinoza introduces two sets of distinctions here in order to classify biblical testimonies of prophetic revelation: the prophet may receive God's revelations (1) either through "words" [*verbis*] or "visible forms" [*figuris*], or both, and these revelations are (2) either true [*verae*] or imaginary [*imaginariae*].[19] He then goes

[19] For an illustration of how each biblical prophet Spinoza mentions might possibly fit into one of these categories, see Laux, *Imagination*, 22.

on to invoke the example of Moses, who is said to have heard God's "true voice" [*voce vera*], when the divine laws were revealed to him on Mount Sinai [see *TTP* 1 (G III 17/C II 79)]. But Spinoza also mentions the case of Samuel who may be taken to have heard God's true voice, yet to preserve the exceptional status of Moses, Spinoza declares Samuel's perception merely imaginary. As Spinoza later emphasizes, these are the only forms of revelation that the Bible discerns. Thus, he rejects the notion that prophecy depends on any sort of "special" media, and although he accepts the exception of Christ, to whom God's decisions "were revealed immediately—without words or visions" [*TTP* 1 (G III 21/C II 84)], he also refuses to understand the notion of divine revelation in terms of immediate knowledge.[20]

The question arises: what do these descriptions show about Spinoza's understanding of the cognitive process he takes to be at the bottom of the phenomenon referred to as prophecy or divine revelation in the Bible? Note that when explaining the perception of imaginary words or figures, Spinoza mentions the "imagination" of the prophet. At first, this may appear not very helpful, as in the *Ethics*, famously, Spinoza proposes a very intricate concept of the imagination that regularly invites controversial interpretations.[21] To mention just one, though crucial interpretive difficulty: given Spinoza's usage of the term "*imagination*," the range of phenomena called "imaginative" is exceptionally wide, and this not just if we compare it with our contemporary understanding of the imagination, but also, as we shall argue, in comparison with both Aristotelian and Cartesian conceptions. Spinoza's imagination not only comprises fantasy and all sorts of misperceptions, but also memory, all sorts of sign-based processes, and, notably, even the veridical perception of singular objects.[22] But how, one may wonder, can one and the same cognitive process account for both illusionary as well as veridical representation of things?

Remarkably, there is a parallel difficulty in the *TTP*. In the passage quoted above, Spinoza describes those revelations relying on "true" words or "true" visible forms as standing "outside the imagination of the prophet." Later in the text, however, Spinoza denies that anyone (with the exception of Christ) can ever receive revelations without the aid of the imagination [see *TTP* 1 (G III 21/C II 85)]. The problem gets even trickier, when it comes to Moses who is said to have received true (*TTP* 1 [G III 21/C II 85]), i.e. not imaginary words, while in receiving them he, too, depended on the imagination. But how, then, can the words he received be "outside" the imagination?

[20] See *TTP* 1 (G III 21/C II 85): "We have asserted, then, that except for Christ no one has received God's revelations without the aid of the imagination, i.e., without the aid of words or images."

[21] For a detailed reconstruction of the concept of the imagination, see Renz, *Erklärbarkeit* (*Explainability*) and "Cognitive Psychology."

[22] Renz, *Erklärbarkeit* (*Explainability*), 187–8.

This problem may be tackled if we take into account that the terminology of the imagination serves quite different purposes in these two passages. In the first passage, Spinoza sets up the category of "imaginary" words or figures [*imaginaria*] in opposition to the true voice in which God revealed himself to Moses. Contrasting the "imaginary" with the "true", the text displays an implicitly epistemological position and thus employs the word in accordance with its usage in ordinary language, where "to imagine things" means that we make up things which are not really there. In the second passage, in contrast, he refers to "the aid of the imagination" [*ops imaginationis*] in order to take the basic procedure in view that underlies all sorts of mental acts and not just special cases of illusion or fiction.[23] Unlike in the first case, Spinoza adopts a purely psychological, i.e. not epistemological point of view here, which only allows him to emphasize the fundamental role of the imagination in all revelation. In short, in the first case Spinoza refers to the implicitly epistemological understanding underlying ordinary usage of the terminology; in the second, we are confronted with a purely psychological statement.[24]

Unfortunately, this distinction between the cognitive or psychological and the epistemological perspective at work in Spinoza's analysis is obscured by the fact that he never explicitly defines the imagination in the *TTP*, let alone specifies its psychological dimension. To compensate for this, we suggest taking a closer look at the theory of the imagination provided in the *Ethics*. We shall see that a proper understanding of Spinoza's views on this concept is in many regards extremely important.

To begin, consider the following passage from E2p17s where Spinoza clarifies his terminology as follows:

> Next, to retain the customary words, the affections of the human Body whose ideas present external bodies as present to us, we shall call images of things, even if they do not reproduce the [NS: external] figures of things. And when the Mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say that it imagines. [E2p17s (G II 106/C I 465)]

In this passage, which is sometimes invoked by scholars to discuss Spinoza's relation to the approaches of his predecessors,[25] Spinoza explicitly claims to "retain the customary words." Yet, when he describes the cognitive function of the bodily

[23] This shift is also touched upon by Laux, although he does not explore it any further. See Laux, *Imagination*, 18: "[La perception imaginaire] est transférée, de l'objectivité de la chose extérieure au processus de formation des images, vers celui qui perçoit, et cela avec suffisamment de force pour que le prophète tienne compte de ce qu'il voit ou entend."

[24] For this distinction between the epistemological and the psychological dimension of the imagination, see Renz, "Cognitive Psychology."

[25] See for example Shapiro, "Imagination and Affects," 89.

affections by saying simply that they "represent [*repraesentant*] external bodies as present [*praesentia*] to us,"[26] he employs the customary words in a manner that distinguishes his approach essentially from that of his precursors. Strikingly, unlike in Aristotle, Descartes, or Clauberg, who all distinguish the imagination from sense perception, Spinoza assumes that for a representation to count as an imagining, it is *not* required that the represented object be either absent or unreal.[27] Instead, following the definition, the term "imagination" comprises all processes by which the mind regards some particular object *as present to us*, whether or not the represented bodies are actually present. Thus, the imagination is conceived as *indifferent* regarding the absence or presence of the imagined object.

Now, to see the gist of this conception it is crucial to notice that Spinoza does not deny here the possibility that we know external objects. His aim is not to rule out that we can ever know whether some object represented is real or not. In other words, the proposed conception of the imagination does not entail some sort of external-world skepticism here. On the contrary, Spinoza even precludes this, as a short look at E2p16, on which he relies in E2p17s, shows.

In E2p16, Spinoza states that the idea of any affection "must involve the nature of the human body and at the same time the nature of the external body." Read together with E1ax4, according to which axiom "the knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause," this proposition grants two things: (1) that at the bottom of any ideas of any affection is something real which is either actually affecting us or has affected us before, and (2) that anything affecting us derives from causes that are in principle accessible.[28] Thus, Spinoza posits that even if some represented object is illusionary, it derives from something that is real and may be accounted for in rational terms. To be sure, *how* humans may actually know these causes is not part of Spinoza's doctrine of the imagination. On the contrary, getting adequate knowledge of these requires humans to leave the perspective they take on things when they imagine them, and to take up a quasi-reflexive stance toward their own affection. And yet, *that* they can know them is already established with E2p16.

Armed with this sketch of Spinoza's theory of the imagination, we are now in a better position to explain what he means by saying that Moses' perception of God's words both relies on and falls outside the imagination. Considered as a psychological procedure, Moses' perception represents the object—God's voice—as present to him; in this sense, "nothing is outside the imagination of the prophet." But this does not preclude that considering the epistemic result of this perception, Moses has acquired some idea that may be evaluated as adequate and

[26] We depart here from Curley's translation that renders *repraesentant* by "present."
[27] See Renz, "Cognitive Psychology," 13–15 for a detailed analysis.
[28] This is an expression of Spinoza's rationalism. See Renz, *Erklärbarkeit* (*Explainability*), 193–4.

true, and the idea is thus—in this epistemic sense of the word—far from imaginary.

Yet even apart from this dissolution of such exegetical riddles, Spinoza's theory of the imagination constitutes an important background for his approach to prophecy and the prophets. It allows for calling into question particular prophetic claims from an epistemological perspective, while yielding a rich psychological understanding of the phenomena referred to as prophecy. Before concluding this section let us therefore take a short look at three of Spinoza's qualifications of prophecy that are related to his theory of the imagination.

Consider, first, how the imagination is referred to in order to explain the prophet's extraordinary mental constitution. As Spinoza explicitly claims in *TTP* 2, prophets are distinguished from other people *not* by their intellectual capacities, but by the vividness of their imagination only [see *TTP* 2 (G III 29/C II 93)]. As we shall point out in the next section, this claim, by which Spinoza departs from previous approaches, is of utmost importance for his view on the social role of prophets. For now, let us just emphasize that—unless we read it against the background of his theory of the imagination—this tenet would be a merely negative claim that disqualifies the prophet as a dreamer. If, however, we take it seriously that following Spinoza's definition to imagine is to represent both absent and present particulars as present, the idea of the prophet's possessing a more vivid imagination also contains a positive meaning: prophets not only fall victim more easily to their fantasy and illusion, they are also, by the very same token, more alert to real things.

Next, remember that the prophet has been introduced at the beginning of *TTP* 1 as an interpreter who translates or communicates divine revelation to others. It would go beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this in detail, as we would have to examine the ways in which according to Spinoza communication or language works. What is clear though is that, since Spinoza considers signs and language as essential effects of the imagination, we can assume that with respect to its inherent communicative dimension, too, prophecy is a matter of the imagination.

Finally, there is an important point which we have not yet touched upon. To compensate for the lack of epistemic reliability of prophecy, Spinoza invokes the notion of the prophets having some "moral" or "prophetic certainty" [see *TTP* 2 (G III 31/C II 95–6)]. What this means and what it implies shall be developed in some detail in the next section of this essay. For now, let us just underline that—far from being an epistemic disqualification of prophetic views merely—the kind of certainty characterizing the prophet is a function of his imaginative power. As we shall argue in the next section, this is not to be meant as a purely negative statement drawing on the epistemologically imperfect nature of revelation, but it indicates that the prophet has something special to offer that not any person has.

To summarize the results of this section we can thus say that the doctrine of the imagination, as it is established in the *Ethics*, constitutes an important

theoretical background for Spinoza's views on prophecy and the prophet. To comprehend this doctrine properly is, therefore, absolutely crucial for an appropriate understanding of Spinoza's views on prophecy. In particular it is essential to see that the notion has a cognitive-psychological meaning that is entirely neutral with respect to the epistemological question of whether some represented object be absent or present, real or fictitious. This being so, Spinoza appeals to the imagination not primarily to make the lack of epistemic reliability in the prophet's opinions visible, but to show in the first instance that the phenomenon known under the name of "prophecy" in the Bible is, without any loss, comprehensible in cognitive-psychological terms.

4. Moral Certainty or On the Value of Prophets for Humans

Among the traditional problems to be dealt with when discussing the nature of prophecy and the prophets is the question of distinguishing the prophet from other people. As we have seen in the previous section, this distinction cannot be explained by the prophet's intellectual capacities. In the beginning of chapter two, Spinoza underscores this by appealing to the way in which the difference between wisdom and prophecy is dealt with in the Old Testament. Spinoza obviously assumes that even the distinction of the prophet is explained by his theory of the imagination.

But as Spinoza also explicitly states, the assumption that the prophet has a more vivid imagination than other people is not sufficient here. In addition, he assumes the prophet's views must display a special kind of certainty, viz. "moral" certainty, a term which is contrasted with the "mathematical certainty" that is grounded on reasoning and thus yields epistemically reliable views.[29] The crucial question therefore is: what does this moral certainty consist of? And how does this notion account for the distinction of the prophet?

Generally, moral certainty departs from mathematical certainty in not providing reliable knowledge, i.e. well-grounded or justified true belief. Yet, there are two ways to understand Spinoza's claim that the prophet must be morally certain of his views. One way would be to assume that the views conveyed by prophets are unsure and thus especially problematic from an epistemological stance. Another reading is to say that the kind of certainty accompanying prophetic claims is not a function of its epistemic reliability, i.e. it has nothing to do with its warrant or justification and thus needs to be understood in other terms.

[29] For the distinction between mathematical and moral certainty, see *TTP* 2 (G III 30–1/C II 95–6). For the roots of the notion of moral certainty in late medieval philosophy, see Pasnau, "Certainty," 367–8.

Spinoza, we think, clearly opts for the second approach. Crucially, he takes the moral certainty of the prophet to *compensate* for the lack of epistemic reliability of his views. Now, for something to compensate for another thing requires that the substitute has a feature in virtue of which it may substitute for the other object. More to the point, the view we ascribe to Spinoza is that although prophetic claims do not express justified true belief or knowledge, the prophet must be reliable in another sense. According to this interpretation, Spinoza considers prophets as individuals whose lack of rational understanding is compensated for some sort of practical "knowledge" or "guidance" that ordinary people miss. Far from touching upon any metaphysical issue, the views of prophets are related to the practical concerns of human life, which explains why prophets were taken to "know" the outcome of a future event, even though they wouldn't be able to give any proof for the fact that it will turn out this way [see *TTP* 2 (G III 30/C II 95)].

Let us now consider this view a little more in depth. To begin with, note that before invoking the distinction between moral and mathematical certainty, Spinoza explicitly states that by its own nature, a singular imagination does not involve any certainty at all [see *TPP* 2 (G III 30/C II 94)]. Therefore, for a subject to be certain of her belief, something must be added to her imagination. In cases of mathematical certainty, what is added is reasoning (*ratiocinium*) (ibid.). But what is added, by contrast, when at a given moment any ground for reasoning is lacking and mathematical certainty is just not available?

Spinoza addresses this question by claiming that the certainty prophets took their views to have was dependent on their perceiving some *sign*. Because the imagination alone is not sufficient for achieving certainty, Spinoza concludes that:

> …by itself, Prophecy cannot involve certainty. As we've shown it depended only on the imagination. So the Prophets were not certain about God's revelation by the revelation itself, but by some sign. [*TTP* 2 (G III 30/C II 94–5)]

Now, it needs to be emphasized that unlike the reasoning yielding mathematic certainty, being merely contingently related with the subject matter in question, signs are no warrants of the *epistemic* reliability of prophetic insight. Therefore, a prophet could be fully convinced of some revelation, and he might thus firmly believe that it came from God, and yet be wrong. In fact, this is just why Spinoza can consider prophetic certainty from a purely descriptive point of view: it is a purely psychological property of the prophet's mind, not an epistemological feature of the prophetic view itself.

This said, it is important to see that the issue of prophetic certainty matters not just for the prophet himself, but also for the community that must decide on whether or not to believe the prophet. If one assumes that prophetic views lack mathematical certainty—and as we argued in the first section, prophecy is believed by the vulgar to go beyond the limits of natural knowledge, so provided

the vulgar understanding, prophetic views cannot but lack mathematical certainty—the question arises of whether there is any criterion or requirement, by means of which one may distinguish legitimate from illegitimate prophets. Thus, the community needs criteria for the attribution of prophetic certainty. Interestingly, in this context, Spinoza voices a further condition when he writes:

> The whole of Prophetic certainty, therefore, is founded on these three things: 1) That the Prophets imagined the things revealed to them very vividly, in the way we are usually affected by objects when we are awake; 2) That there was a Sign; 3) And finally—this is the chief thing—that they had a heart inclined only to the right and the good. [*TTP* 2 (G III 31/C II 96)][30]

Thus, far from reducing it to the effects of the prophet's vivid imagination and the existence of a sign, Spinoza takes prophetic certainty also to depend on the prophet's having a "heart inclined only to the right and the good," which, he emphasizes, is "the chief thing."

One might wonder whether this is really an original move. As several interpreters have pointed out,[31] Spinoza echoes traditional accounts of prophecy here such as the one put forward by Maimonides, to whom also various figures of the Dutch Protestant Church were deeply indebted.[32] According to Maimonides, anyone who claims to be a prophet must meet certain requirements in order to qualify for being a true prophet, and being of righteous character is one of them.[33] Maimonides thus comprehends the notion of prophecy in terms of a particular kind of human perfection, which is why some recent interpretations read the Maimonidean notion of prophecy in terms of a naturalistic approach.[34] That a person becomes a prophet is, so the basic contention goes, in the first place a matter of his having a certain character; i.e. he must be subject to a particular *natural disposition* as it were.[35]

The question is how precisely Spinoza relates to this traditional account. What he refers to as "the chief thing," i.e. "the inclination of the heart to right and the good," looks like a parallel to Maimonides' righteous character. One may therefore be tempted, at first glance, to read Spinoza's criteria for someone's being a prophet in line with the naturalist approach to prophecy mentioned earlier, the readings of which may be motivated by the obvious fact that Spinoza indeed

[30] That these three features of revelation, by which Spinoza summarizes the results of his readings of several biblical texts, are compatible with Calvinist Orthodoxy, has been underlined by James, *Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*, 61.

[31] For alleged influences as well as dissociations between Maimonides and Spinoza in regards to prophecy, see Harvey, "Portrait"; Ravven, "Maimonideanism"; Chalier, *Lecteur*; and Nadler, "Maimonides."

[32] See James, *Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*, 45.

[33] See Maimonides, *Guide*, II:36, 371.

[34] See Kreisel, *Prophecy*, ch. 3; Nadler, *Forged in Hell*, 65; and Nadler, "Maimonides," 190–1.

[35] See Maimonides, *Guide*, II:32, 360–3.

adopts a naturalist stance with respect to all sorts of phenomena. There is however an important distinction between Maimonides' and Spinoza's account here, as they disagree with respect to the question of what constitutes the natural disposition of the prophet and what doesn't. For Maimonides it is not just imagination and virtuous character that makes someone a prophet, but also the intellectual ability to receive an "overflow" from God through the Active Intellect.[36] Spinoza in contrast avoids characterizing the prophet's distinction in terms of some assumed intellectual capacity; instead, he conceptualizes prophecy merely in terms of the vividness of the prophet's imagination.

This has important implications with respect to the paradigmatic role of the prophet. Being of a virtuous character *and* having excellent intellectual capacities, the Maimonidean prophet comes close to the virtuous philosopher; in fact, for Maimonides being a philosopher is a necessary precondition for becoming a prophet![37] Spinoza's prophet, in contrast, has a different part to play. Lacking particular intellectual capacities, he—or she[38]—is in some respect the antagonist of the philosopher, while in another respect the prophet is the philosopher's ally. Prophets have no special aptitude for true knowledge, yet they are good persons. They may recommend themselves for their righteousness, but not for their knowledgeability.

Having established this, we are now in a position to propose a subtler interpretation of Spinoza's views on the distinction of the prophet. When specifying how to discern legitimate from illegitimate prophets, we claim, Spinoza does not, or not primarily, address the problem of who at the end of the day qualifies as a prophet. Instead, his question is already raised from the perspective of finite subjects who are confronted with the problem that they have to find out whether or not they can trust a prophet. In other words, our view is this: it is to respond to the problem of how to recognize reliable leaders in situation of epistemic uncertainty that Spinoza establishes as a third condition for prophetic certainty that the prophet is of a righteous character.

This matters for two reasons. First, it makes clear that Spinoza sometimes discusses problems that are raised, and this essentially so, from the perspective of finite human beings. One can even go farther and claim that, for Spinoza, some philosophical problems are only comprehensible, because there are such things as human beings, i.e. things that have a particular, necessarily embedded, perspective on reality. And yet, provided there are human beings, these problems arise time and again. The issue of the distinction between legitimate and

[36] See Maimonides, *Guide*, II:36, 369. It is beyond the scope of this paper to determine the exact role of the Active Intellect for Maimonides' definition of prophecy. In order to elaborate on that, one would have to consider the Arabic philosophical background in general and the works of Al-Farabi in particular. See Macy, "Alfarabi"; Berman, "Disciple"; and Kreisel, *Prophecy*, esp. 169–70 and 241–6.

[37] See Maimonides, *Guide*, II:36, 371.

[38] In the beginning of chapter two, Spinoza explicitly mentions Hagar as "being granted the gift of Prophecy" [*TPP* 2 (G III 29/C II 93)].

illegitimate prophets is certainly of this sort; after all, *sub specie aeternitatis* prophets, drunkards, and egomaniac fools are all of the same kind. Not just are they, ontologically speaking, simple modes or modifications of one and the same substance or reality; they are also all driven by views on the world that lack epistemic warrant and may turn out entirely inadequate. In other words, epistemologically considered they are all subject to "defects" in a sense, yet *sub specie durationis*, the difference between drunkards, egomaniacs and prophets is nonetheless essential: if, for instance, as finite subjects we wonder whether it is wise to trust a politician and make him a leader, then it is of course of great importance, if he is a drunkard or an egomaniac fool, or, in contrast, of a "heart inclined only to the right and the good."[39]

To some extent, this also explains why this point is considered the "chief thing". That a prophet needs to satisfy this third requirement does not overrule the first and the second. Notably, it is the second criterion, viz. that there were signs, that is most mentioned in the sources Spinoza invokes. But it is the "heart inclined only to the right and the good" why, in situations of general ignorance, prophets may be at all trusted: given they satisfy this requirement, they are to some extent reliable, more reliable in any case than people whose heart is only partially inclined to the right and the good.

A second point needs to be emphasized. Spinoza not only regards the problem of the distinction between the legitimate and the illegitimate prophet as one that is *raised* from the perspective of living human beings, but he also *responds* to it from this perspective. This is crucial, as, in fact, this is the only way how he can truly address the concern behind it. It would at least be of a very restricted usefulness, if he just said: "If you wonder whether someone is a legitimate or merely pretense prophet, just consider whether his opinions are adequate or not!" as in many situations, and with respect to future challenges, adequate knowledge is just not available! But he gives advice to the effect that the main criterion—"the chief thing" [*TTP* 2 (G III 31/C II 96)]—for deciding whether we should accept someone as a leader, or a legitimate prophet in biblical terms, is whether the person satisfies the third of the traditional criteria.

We can conclude this section by pointing out that Spinoza is apparently entirely aware of the fact that even the insight into the natural constitution of the prophetic mind does not help, when it comes to decide whether someone is a trustworthy prophet or leader, for leaders are established in situations of epistemic uncertainty. This is, we have argued, the reason why he claims that the "chief thing" in the constitution of prophetic certainty is the prophet's righteousness. Following this advice, it may of course be the case that the prophet doesn't know either what to do in such a situation, yet at least he does not abuse our trust in him for his own concerns.

[39] See Hutchins and Renz, "Human and Divine." For a general discussion of the significance of this kind of problems for philosophy see also Renz, "Problems," 218–20.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this essay, we suggested a novel reconstruction of Spinoza's account of prophecy and the prophets according to which, when interpreting the Bible, Spinoza did not just critically discuss biblical views from an epistemological or metaphysical perspective but also employed the analysis of religious phenomena to address specific social or political concerns. This anthropological or social-theoretical reading departs from a purely secularist interpretation by the assumption that when reading the *TTP*, one cannot content oneself, methodologically speaking, with explaining the articulated views, concepts, or distinctions by means of the tools established in Spinoza's *Ethics*, as this often amounts to explaining them away. Instead, we proposed to connect Spinoza's views on religious phenomena with problems as they emerge from an eminently embedded, i.e. irreducibly human standpoint. With respect to the issue of prophecy and the prophets, we suggested to read Spinoza as responding to the question of criteria for good political leaders in situations of general ignorance.

This said, we do not want to deny the notion that Spinoza was a naturalist and that he was skeptical about the traditional understanding of many religious phenomena. Considered against the background of Spinoza's metaphysical and epistemological views established in the *Ethics*, there is no doubt about that. But the view we ascribe to Spinoza is, rather, that when it comes to comprehending the anthropological roots or the social and political dimension of religious issues, then it is not very useful to account for religion in naturalist terms. This is significant for both a proper understanding of the project of the *TTP* and Spinoza's views on the ways human life is shaped by politics. In this vein, Spinoza's reading of the Bible is of philosophical value even for our contemporary times: it is a lesson in a social and political theory that takes the human perspective seriously.[40]

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12
Philosophy and Theology, Reason and Revelation

The *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

Daniel Garber

1. Introduction

On the title page of his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (*TTP*), Spinoza tells the reader what the main message of the book is: "Several discussions showing that the republic can grant freedom of philosophizing without harming its peace or piety, and cannot deny it without destroying its peace and piety." Central here is Spinoza's demonstration of the independence of philosophy and theology. Spinoza argues that Scripture "…requires nothing from men but obedience, and condemns only stubbornness, not ignorance," where "…obedience to God consists only in the love of your neighbor…" [*TTP* 13 (G III 168/C II 258)]. Theology, then, is characterized in terms of Scripture and revelation: "By theology here I understand…revelation, insofar as it indicated the goal we said Scripture aims at: the principle and manner of obedience…" [*TTP* 15 (G III 184/C II 278)]. Reason, or philosophy, on the other hand is concerned with truth. And so, Spinoza argues, the two are completely separate and distinct from one another: "…reason's domain is truth and wisdom; theology's is piety and obedience." And so, he argues, "…Theology is not bound to be the handmaid of reason, nor reason the handmaid of theology, but…each rules its own domain" [*TTP* 15 (G III 184/C II 277)].

Now, Spinoza's conception of philosophy isn't that distant from what his contemporaries meant by the term. For example, Franco Burgersdijk, the Leiden professor whose textbooks were read by generations of students, almost certainly including Spinoza, defined philosophy as "the knowledge [*cognitio*] of things both divine and human to the extent that man is able to attain it through the natural light of the intellect."[1] This definition is echoed in the preface to the French translation of Descartes's *Principia philosophiae*, where he defines philosophy as

[1] Burgersdijk, *Idea*, 8.

"the study of wisdom," meaning "not only prudence in our everyday affairs but also a perfect knowledge [*connoissance*] of all things that mankind is capable of knowing…."[2] Both definitions certainly suggest the centrality of truth. But when Spinoza talks about theology here, he doesn't mean theology as it was actually practiced in his day (or ours, for that matter). Spinoza was not very impressed with what contemporaries in the community of theologians were up to:

> Theologians have mainly been anxious to twist their own inventions and fancies out of the sacred texts, to fortify them with divine authority.… If they're worried about anything, it's not that they fear they may ascribe some error to the Holy Spirit and stray from the path to salvation, but that others may convict them of error, trampling on their authority and exposing them to scorn. [*TTP* 7 (G III 97/C II 170)]

Indeed, one might think of what he is doing in the *TTP* as offering a revisionary account of what theology is. Defined in terms of obedience to God, Spinoza's conception of theology departs significantly from many accounts of the domain of theology in the Christian literature. While the domain of theology as actually practiced historically is enormously complex, it is fair to say that it was widely accepted that theology is, like philosophy, a science, a *scientia*.[3] In defining theology in terms of obedience and piety, as he does, Spinoza is explicitly rejecting this conception of theology and substituting another. To remind ourselves that Spinoza is using the term 'theology' in his somewhat idiosyncratic way, I shall sometimes refer to the person who adheres to such a conception of theology as "Spinoza's theologian," as opposed to "the theologian."[4]

At the end of the preface, after presenting a summary of the main arguments of the book, Spinoza declares that the *TTP* is primarily addressed at the philosopher:

> These, Philosophical reader, are the things I here give you to examine.…As for those who are not philosophers, I am not eager to commend this treatise to them. [*TTP* pref (G III 12/C II 75)]

[2] AT IXB 2/CSMK I 179.

[3] See e.g. Augustine, *De trinitate* XIV.1; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* I.1.2; and in a later source that Spinoza likely knew, Heereboord, *Meletemata*, 214. See also Leinsle, *Scholastic Theology*, esp. ch. 3 ("Theology as a Science at the University"). Given his rather critical discussions of the relation between philosophy and theology in Maimonides [*TTP* 7 (G III 113–16/C II 187–90)] and in Alfakhar [*TTP* 15 (G III 181–4/C II 272–7)], it seems unlikely that he would have gotten this revisionist conception of theology from the Jewish tradition either.

[4] Des Chene, "Cartesiomania," 547 traces this conception of theology, its limitation to revelation, and its radical distinction from philosophy back to Descartes and Cartesianism. See also Douglas, *Dutch Cartesianism*, 43–53. For an alternative point of view, see Goudriaan, "Early Modern Theology."

It isn't entirely clear here whether Spinoza is concerned with the fully formed philosopher, someone who has thought through the issues with the thoroughness that Spinoza brought to his *Ethics*, or whether he has in mind someone who is inclined toward reason and truth, but is less advanced, someone we might call a would-be philosopher.[5] I would think that we have to consider both as belonging to Spinoza's audience. However, Spinoza explicitly excludes the common person, the *vulgus*, the imperfectly rational person:

> …I don't ask the common people [*vulgus*] to read these things, nor anyone else who is struggling with the same affects as the common people. Indeed, I would prefer them to neglect this book entirely, rather than make trouble by interpreting it perversely, as they usually do with everything. [*TTP* pref (G III 12/C II 75)]

But what about the theologian? Despite the fact that the theologian is not even mentioned here, theology and revelation are very much at the center of Spinoza's argument in the *TTP*, and it is hard to exclude the theologian from Spinoza's audience. While Spinoza is primarily addressing the philosopher and the theologian in the *TTP*, despite what he explicitly says in the preface, the common person is not altogether excluded: as Leo Strauss noted, "the vulgar are listening,"[6] and, I shall argue, Spinoza had a message for them as well.

In this chapter I would like to follow some themes in Spinoza's complex dialogue between reason and revelation, philosophy and theology, largely as it is played out in the *TTP*. When we examine what Spinoza thinks revelation teaches, it will quickly turn out that there appears to be a glaring inconsistency between revelation, that's to say theology, and philosophy. What revelation teaches, Spinoza argues, is obedience to God and his laws. But to be obedient, it will turn out, we must conceive of God as a law-giver who enforces the laws that he frames, a conception of God radically at odds with the God that reason shows us in the *Ethics*. If the philosopher's conception of God is right, then we must reject the theologian's conception of God and with it what revelation tells us. But if the theologian is right, then we must reject the conception of God that reason demands. What, then, of the supposed independence of philosophy and theology that Spinoza promises?

2. Revelation

It is obvious that Spinoza directs the *TTP*, at least in its opening chapters, at a reader who is concerned with revelation, a reader who, one might presume,

[5] On this see e.g. Strauss, *Persecution* 184; Frankel, "Politics and Rhetoric"; Curley at C II 75n.
[6] Strauss, *Persecution*, 184.

begins their philosophical journey with the view that revelation is at least potentially source of real knowledge. The very first chapter is entitled "Of Prophecy" and begins with the following words: "Prophecy, or Revelation, is the certain knowledge of some matter which God has revealed to men" [*TTP* 1 (G III 15/C II 76)]. Chapter 2 continues this discussion with an examination of prophets, those who supposedly transmit revelation. Chapters 3 to 6 deal with some things that are supposedly learned from revelation, that the Hebrews were chosen by God and that they had a special gift for prophecy (chapter 3), the divine laws presumably transmitted through revelation (chapter 4), the ceremonies and narratives that we learn through Scripture (chapter 5), and the miracles that we have learned through revelation (chapter 6). Then, in chapters 7 to 13 Spinoza discusses Holy Scripture, the means by which revelation has been transmitted to us now, how to interpret it, and, finally, what Spinoza claims that it teaches us.[7]

The kind of knowledge that we acquire from the Scriptures is knowledge by testimony, what the authors of the Scriptures relate, often about what prophets report they have been told by God. This is what Spinoza calls knowledge of the first kind in the *Ethics* [E2p40s2].[8] As with all knowledge of the first kind, there are limitations as far as its certainty: the Bible was written by human beings and transmitted over a long period of time. As such, errors inevitably creep in. What we can hope to learn from the Bible is set out in the account he gives of his method of scriptural interpretation:

> [T]o interpret Scripture it is necessary to prepare a straightforward history of Scripture and to infer from it the mind of Scripture's authors [*mentem authorum Scripturae*], by legitimate inferences, as from certain data and principles. [*TTP* 7 (G III 98/C II 171)]

By the "mind of Scripture's authors" Spinoza means what the authors thought. This suggests that what we can learn from interpreting the Bible is what the authors of Scripture may have *thought* about things. If we have reports of prophets and their prophesies, we can learn what the authors of the Bible thought those prophets were trying to communicate.

After a close examination of Scripture, Spinoza concludes with the message its authors thought that the prophets were trying to convey:

> [W]e know that the purpose of Scripture was not to teach the sciences. From this we can easily judge that it requires nothing from men but obedience,

[7] Spinoza asserts that "because today, as far as I know, we have no Prophets, our only option is to expound the sacred books left us by the Prophets" [*TTP* 1 (G III 16/C II 78)].

[8] Spinoza doesn't use the terminology of knowledge of the first kind in the *TTP*, though he does explicitly establish—by scriptural evidence—that everything that the Prophets learned came either from words or from visible forms. See *TTP* 1 (G III 17–20/C II 84).

> and condemns only stubbornness, not ignorance. Next, obedience to God consists only in the love of your neighbor—for as Paul says in Romans 13:8, he who loves his neighbor in order that he may obey God has fulfilled the Law. [*TTP* 13 (G III 168/C II 258)]

This, Spinoza argues, is the true content of scriptural revelation. Let us summarize this deliverance of revelation by the following imperatives:

[*Obed*] Be obedient to God
[*Love*] Love your neighbor as yourself.[9]

We might say that [*Obed*] entails [*Love*]. That is, if one satisfies [*Obed*] then one also satisfies [*Love*]. But from the perspective of revelation, and thus from the perspective of the theologian, the two imperatives are really the same imperative: to be obedient to God *is just the same thing* as to love your neighbor as yourself.

It is important here that these are imperatives, and not propositions: they are injunctions to do something, to behave in a particular way, and not truths. And this, of course, is what gives us the distinction between theology and philosophy discussed above: unlike philosophy, the domain of truth, theology is the domain of piety, obeying God and acting with justice and loving-kindness (*caritas*) toward others.

But in addition to [*Obed*] and [*Love*], there is something else that we can learn from Scripture. Now, Spinoza argues, there is a sense in which everything we learn from reason can be considered a kind of revelation or, equivalently, prophecy. He writes:

> Prophecy, or Revelation, is the certain knowledge [*cognitio*] of some matter which God has revealed to men.… From the definition just given, it follows that natural knowledge [*cognitionem naturalem*] can be called Prophecy. For what we know by the natural light depends only on the knowledge of God [*Dei cognitione*] and of his eternal decrees. [*TTP* 1 (G III 15/C II 76)][10]

And insofar as he holds that "Prophets were not endowed with a more perfect mind, but rather with a power of imagining unusually vividly" [*TTP* 2 (G III 29/C II 93)], Spinoza implies that virtually everything that the Prophets transmit to us can be learned through reason. But, he claims, there is one thing that cannot:

[9] Occasionally Spinoza suggests a slightly different imperative: "…to love God above all else, and to love your neighbor as yourself" [*TTP* 12 (G III 165/C II 255)].

[10] Though it is a kind of prophecy, it is different from other prophecy insofar as it isn't derived from prophets or from Scripture.

> I judge the utility, even necessity, of Sacred Scripture, or revelation, to be very great. We can't perceive by the natural light that simple obedience is a path to salvation. Only revelation teaches that this happens, by a special grace of God, which we cannot grasp by reason. It follows that Scripture has brought great comfort to mortals. [*TTP* 15 (G III 188/C II 281); cf. *TTP* 15 (G III 185/C II 278)]

We can summarize this as follows:

> [*Salv*] One can attain salvation through obedience to God, by loving one's neighbor as oneself.

The sufficiency of obedience for salvation is the only lesson that Spinoza thinks can be learned through revelation alone.

Now, unlike [*Obed*] or [*Love*], [*Salv*] appears to be a proposition, something with a truth value. But it is not something that one can learn through reason. That is, it is not a truth of philosophy: if it is a truth at all, it is a truth of theology. Spinoza claims that it is certain, not absolutely but only morally:

> Nevertheless, we cannot demonstrate by reason whether the foundation of theology—that men are saved by mere obedience [*sola obedientia salvantur*]—is true or false. So someone may raise against us too the objection: why then do we believe it? If we embrace it without reason, like blind men, then we too act foolishly and without judgment. On the other hand, if we want to maintain that we can demonstrate this foundation rationally, then theology will be a part of philosophy, and ought not to be separated from it.
>
> To this I reply that I maintain unconditionally that the natural light cannot discover this fundamental tenet of theology—or at least that no one yet has demonstrated it. So revelation has been most necessary. Nevertheless, I maintain that we can use our judgment, so that we accept what has already been revealed with at least moral certainty. I say with moral certainty, for we should not expect to be able to be more certain of it than the Prophets were. As we've already shown in Ch. 2 of this Treatise, those who first received the revelation had a certainty which was only moral. [*TTP* 15 (G III 185/C II 278)][11]

[11] It is reasonable to suppose that moral certainty is a notion that Spinoza borrowed from Descartes. In his *Principia philosophiae* (1644), Descartes says that things are morally certain if they have "sufficient certainty for application to ordinary life, even though they may be uncertain in relation to the absolute power of God" [Descartes, *Principia philosophiae* IV.205 (AT VIIIA 327/CSM I 289–90)]. On moral certainty in Descartes and on that notion as used in late scholastic philosophy, see Ariew, *Scholastics*, 36–43. For a different account of moral certainty more directly related to Spinoza, see Matheron, *Le Christ*, ch. 4. But Matheron's account is very closely connected with his reading of what Spinoza calls the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith, a reading that I find problematic, as I shall discuss below.

That [*Salv*] is morally certain is itself a proposition in theology, it would seem. The claim is that if it were rationally demonstrable then [*Salv*] would be a proposition in philosophy. There are, then, standards for what counts as a real revelation, and what doesn't. And by those standards, Spinoza is clear that [*Salv*] should be accepted:

> So even though this foundation of the whole of theology and Scripture cannot be shown by a mathematical demonstration, we can still embrace it with sound judgment. For it's sheer stupidity to be unwilling to embrace what has been confirmed by so many testimonies of the Prophets—and what, moreover, is a great comfort to those whose powers of reason are not strong, what brings no slight advantage to the Republic, and what we can believe with absolutely no risk or harm—merely because it can't be mathematically demonstrated. This would be

In *TTP* 15, when characterizing [*Salv*] as morally certain, Spinoza refers back to his discussion of prophecy in *TTP* 2. There he argues that "Prophetic certainty was not mathematical, but only moral, as is evident from Scripture itself" [*TTP* 2 (G III 30–1/C II 85)]. (As noted earlier, prophecy and revelation are the same for Spinoza [*TTP* 1 (G III 15/C II 76)].) His claim is that Scriptures show that to be accepted as a genuine prophet, one must satisfy three conditions:

(1) That the Prophets imagined the things revealed to them very vividly…
(2) That there was a Sign
(3) And finally…that they had a heart inclined only to the right and the good. [*TTP* 2 (G III 31/C II 96)]

Spinoza argues that both the sign and the revelation itself were tailored to the individual prophet. The signs were miracles intended to validate the prophecy. Spinoza argues that since:

> …the signs were given only to persuade the Prophet, it follows that the signs were given according to the opinions and capacity of the Prophet. So a sign which would render one Prophet certain of his Prophecy could not at all convince another, who was steeped in different opinions. That's why the signs varied in each Prophet. [*TTP* 2 (G III 32/C II 97)]

It is similar for the revelation itself:

> Similarly, the revelation itself varied in each Prophet…according to the disposition of his bodily temperament, according to the disposition of his imagination, and according to the opinions he had previously embraced. [*TTP* 2 (G III 32/C II 97)]

For this reason, Spinoza argues that prophecy must be only morally certain, not mathematically certain. And since "the authority of the Bible depends on the authority of the Prophets, so it can't be demonstrated by any stronger arguments than those the Prophets used long ago to persuade the people of their own authority" [*TTP* 15 (G III 185–6/C II 279)].

There is, though, a complication with the appeal to a sign here. Spinoza is clear that a sign, understood as a miracle, is required for a prophecy (revelation) to be morally certain [*TTP* 2 (G III 31–2/C II 96–7); *TTP* 15 (G III 286/C II 279–80)]. But the central argument of *TTP* 6 is to deny that there are miracles in the sense of violations of the laws of nature. However, Spinoza considers this a conclusion derived from reason ("the natural light"), that is to say, philosophy. [*TTP* 6 (G III 94–5/C II 167)]. He is clear that what is at issue in the moral certainty of prophecy is miracles/signs as connected with the opinions that people had, and their *belief* in certain events as miracles [*TTP* 6 (G III 88/C II 160)]. On a related point, see Rosenthal, "Miracles," which shows the ways in which belief in miracles among the common people play a role in Spinoza's politics. See also Nadler, "Scripture and Truth," which suggests a similar position. If I read him correctly, Harvey, "Miracles," 674–5 suggests that the apparent contradictions in Spinoza's position are both real and intentional, as in Maimonides, and intended to point to an underlying esoteric position, perhaps one contrary to revelation. It should be noted in a late letter to Oldenburg, December 1, 1675, Spinoza suggests dropping the appeal to miracles altogether in evaluating prophets [Ep 73 (G IV 307–8/C II 467–8].

> as if, to organize our lives wisely, we should admit nothing as true which can be called in doubt by any reason for doubting, or as if most of our actions were not uncertain and full of risk. [*TTP* 15 (G III 187/C II 280)]

It is interesting here that we can embrace [*amplectimur*] the principle [*Salv*] not as true, but "with sound judgment" "*sano judicio*."[12] If [*Salv*] is a doctrine, it is a doctrine not of philosophy, the domain of truth, but of theology, the domain of piety.

3. Salvation, Obedience, and Reason

Important questions here are what Spinoza means by "obedience" in [*Obed*] and [*Salv*], and by "salvation" in [*Salv*].

Now, there is a sense in which [*Love*], the imperative to love your neighbor, is a kind of requirement of reason. This follows from considerations that Spinoza advances in the *Ethics*, in E4p37: "The good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men; and this Desire is greater as his knowledge of God is greater." Roughly speaking, the argument is that what we want for ourselves, insofar as we are rational, is to become more and more rational. Since we realize that others are more useful to us insofar as they realize that we need one another, and insofar as they realize that people need one another insofar as they are rational, we want to help others become more and more rational so that we can all become more useful to one another, and in particular, so that my fellow humans can be more useful to me. In this way there is a rational imperative for us to want for others the rationality that we want for ourselves. In this sense we are enjoined *by reason* to love our neighbors as ourselves.

But Spinoza distinguishes between loving your neighbor through understanding and rational considerations, on the one hand, and loving your neighbor through obedience.[13] In *TTP* 16, he writes:

> No one knows, by nature, that he's bound to obey God. This knowledge is something he can't acquire by reason at all, but only by revelation, confirmed by signs. [*TTP* 16 (G III 198/C II 292–3)]

In his late annotations on the *TTP*, Spinoza added the following comment on this sentence:

[12] On the notion of sound judgment in this context, see Lærke, *Freedom of Philosophizing*, 45–50.
[13] On *obedientia*, see Totaro, "*Obedientia*," 123–39.

> Obedience is concerned with the will of the one commanding, not with the necessity and truth of the matter. Moreover, since we're ignorant of the nature of God's will, and on the other hand, know with certainty that whatever happens, happens only by God's power, it's only by revelation that we can know whether God wills that men should worship him with some honor, as they would a prince.
>
> Moreover, we've shown that the divine laws seem to us to be laws, or things instituted, just as long as we do not know their cause. But when this is known, they thereby cease to be laws, and we embrace them not as laws, but as eternal truths. That is, obedience passes into love, which proceeds from true knowledge as necessarily as light does from the sun.
>
> So under the guidance of reason we can love God, but not obey him. For we cannot embrace the divine laws as divine so long as we are ignorant of their cause; and we cannot, by reason, conceive God as establishing those laws like a prince. [*TTP* 16, ADN 34 (G III 264/C II 292–3n21)]

Spinoza characterizes obedience as follows: "obedience consists in someone's carrying out a command solely on the authority of the person who commands it" [*TTP* 5 (G III 74/C II 144)]. When we satisfy the imperative to love our neighbor *as* a commandment to which we must be obedient, then we are assuming that there is a divine law-giver who makes that commandment, who punishes us if we break it and rewards us if we keep it. But if we love our neighbor through rational understanding, then it is not *obedience*, strictly speaking, but understanding. The commandment then ceases to be a law, and "obedience passes into love, which proceeds from true knowledge as necessarily as light does from the sun." Indeed, when we love our neighbor through reason and not through obedience, then [*Love*] seems to be transformed from an imperative to an eternal truth, from theology to philosophy, though it isn't clear exactly how to understand this curious transformation, or even what exactly the truth is that corresponds to the imperative.

Now, both reason and obedience lead a person toward loving their neighbor as themselves, and thus satisfying [*Love*]. And, Spinoza says in a number of passages, both ways of satisfying [*Love*] lead to salvation. He writes:

> …God's Kingdom exists wherever justice and loving-kindness have the force of law and of a command. I see no difference here whether it's by the natural light or by revelation that God teaches and commands the true practice of justice and loving-kindness. It doesn't matter how that practice is revealed, so long as it constitutes the supreme duty [*jus*] and is the supreme law for men. [*TTP* 19 (G III 229/C II 333)][14]

[14] Translation altered.

Similarly, in an annotation added to the text after it was published, Spinoza wrote:

> That is, revelation can teach that it's enough for salvation or blessedness to embrace the divine decrees as laws or commands, and that it's not necessary to conceive them as eternal truths. [*TTP* 15, ADN 31 (G III 263/C II 281n23)][15]

But what does Spinoza mean here by salvation? In the *TTP* Spinoza has remarkably little to say about what it is supposed to be. He writes:

> And because true salvation and blessedness consists in true peace of mind [*animi acquiescentia*], and we truly find peace only in those things we understand very clearly, from this it follows with utmost clarity that we can grasp with certainty the intention of Scripture concerning things salutary and necessary for blessedness. [*TTP* 7 (G III 111/C II 185–6)][16]

Here salvation is identified with blessedness, with peace of mind, and with understanding of the utmost clarity.[17] Spinoza's conception of salvation in the *Ethics* is, at least superficially, rather similar:

> From this we clearly understand wherein our salvation or blessedness, or Freedom, consists, viz. in a constant and eternal Love of God, or in God's Love for men.…[W]hether this Love is related to God or to the Mind, it can rightly be called peace of mind [*animi acquiescentia*] ….[E5p36s (G II 303/C I 612)][18]

This is very similar to the way that Spinoza characterizes the wise man at the very end of the *Ethics*:

> [T]he wise man, insofar as he is considered as such, is hardly troubled in spirit, but being, by a certain eternal necessity, conscious of himself, and of God, and of things, he never ceases to be, but always possesses true peace of mind [*animi acquiescentia*]. [E5p42s (G II 308/C I 617)]

[15] See also *TTP* 5 (G III 80/C II 152); *TTP* 19 (G III 230/C II 334); Spinoza to Ostens, February 1671, Ep 43 (G III 223b–4b/C II 388)].

[16] On the important concept of *animi acquiescentia* and its relation to *beatitudo*, see Totaro, *Instrumenta*, 9–15.

[17] It is also identified with blessedness in the annotation to *TTP* 15, quoted above [*TTP* 15, ADN 31 (G III 263/C II 281n23)]. In an earlier passage from *TTP* 15 (G III 184/C II 277) Spinoza asserts that "men can be blessed by obedience alone," in a context in which he also talks about salvation, suggesting that salvation and blessedness are the same.

[18] E5p36c asserts that "…insofar as God loves himself, he loves men, and consequently that God's love of men and the Mind's intellectual Love of God are one and the same." Hence the identification of the two in the passage quoted.

In both the *TTP* and the *Ethics*, salvation is equated with blessedness and with peace of mind. In the passage of the *Ethics*, it is further identified with freedom and with the love of God, while in the *TTP* it is identified with clear understanding. But freedom is closely linked with following reason in the *Ethics*,[19] which corresponds to clear understanding in the *TTP*. Furthermore, attaining the third kind of knowledge, the highest form of knowledge, is, in the *Ethics*, what leads the mind to an intellectual love of God [E5p32c], which is the highest achievement of understanding, and is true blessedness [E5p42d]. In this way, the kind of salvation that one gets from revelation and obedience would appear to be quite comparable to the kind of salvation that one can hope for through reason and philosophy.[20]

But that is probably an overstatement. The philosopher's salvation comes through the highest exercise of understanding, knowledge of the third kind, which is not going to be accessible to the non-philosopher, and even among philosophers one suspects that Spinoza thinks that most will not be able to attain it. As he says at the very end of the *Ethics*, "…all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare" [E5p42s]. One can come to love God and attain a kind of *animi acquiescentia* simply through being obedient to God, without going through the rigorous intellectual regimen of the *Ethics*, to be sure. But the theologian's salvation through revelation and obedience will certainly be different from the philosopher's intellectual love of God. And, one supposes, Spinoza thinks of it as an inferior sort of salvation.[21]

I think that it is fair to say that Spinoza thinks that the beatitude and salvation that the philosopher reaches is superior to the salvation open to the theologian and to the salvation that is open to the common person. But that said, Spinoza

[19] In E4p67d, a "free man" is characterized as "one who lives according to the dictate of reason alone."

[20] In a strange argument, Alexandre Matheron argues that the salvation that Spinoza imagines for the common person is exactly the same as the salvation of the *Ethics*. His argument seems to be that obedience can lead the common person to a full-fledged salvation, not in this life, but if we can imagine the person (or a person who shares their essence) returning to a fully reformed society that would allow for such intellectual growth. See Matheron, *Le Christ*, 207–8 and ch. 5. See also Matheron's careful examination of different degrees of salvation (and obedience) in *Le Christ*, ch. 3. (Matheron distinguishes between "le salut au sens fort" [153] and "un salut au sens faible" [173].) Matheron ultimately concludes that the only genuine sense of salvation is the strong sense in E5. [198] Cook, "Did Spinoza Lie," 229–31 comes to a similar conclusion about what salvation consists in, though unlike Matheron, he doesn't think it is attainable through obedience. More recently, Andrea Sangiacomo defends the claim that there is a unitary sense of salvation in Spinoza's writings. See Sangiacomo, *Reason, Passions*, ch. 3.

[21] Furthermore, the kind of salvation that Spinoza offers the common people, *animi acquiescentia* that arises from being obedient to God, is also very different from the kind of salvation that they may have *thought* that they were getting, and what they *thought* that they were being promised by religion, that is, a reward in the afterlife. See E5p41s (G II 307/C I 615–16). This is a point that was emphasized in a personal exchange with Deniz Dağci. Perhaps one of the functions of the *TTP* is to show the theologian and the common person that, as a matter of fact, Scripture doesn't actually make such a promise of a reward in the afterlife.

doesn't seem to disparage the *vulgus* altogether, nor does he seem to reject theology. At the end of chapter 15 of the *TTP* he writes:

> Before I proceed to other things, I want to remind you…that I judge the utility, even necessity, of Sacred Scripture, *or* revelation, to be very great. We can't perceive by the natural light that simple obedience is a path to salvation. Only revelation teaches that this happens, by a special grace of God, which we cannot grasp by reason. It follows that Scripture has brought great comfort to mortals. Everyone, without exception, can obey. But only a very few (compared with the whole human race) acquire a habit of virtue from the guidance of reason alone. So, if we didn't have this testimony of Scripture, we would doubt nearly everyone's salvation. [*TTP* 15 (G III 188/C II 281–2)]

In this way Spinoza seems to allow for the salvation of the faithful and the obedient who follow revelation and are obedient to God, as well as the philosophers who follow reason.

4. Obedience, Faith, and Reason

So far, so good. But there is a significant complication. Now, Spinoza doesn't think that theology (Scripture) gives us any *speculative* knowledge through revelation, with the exception of [*Salv*]: speculative knowledge is what we get from philosophy.[22] But, on the other hand, through the notion of faith, obedience seems to be closely connected to a cognitive commitment related to God and God's nature.

In the *TTP*, Spinoza is working in a theological context in which there is a difference of opinion over whether salvation comes through faith or through works. He writes:

[22] Another apparent exception to this is suggested in a passage in *TTP* 5:

> The strictly speculative matters Scripture wishes to teach are chiefly these: there is a God, *or* a being who has made all things, who directs and sustains them with supreme wisdom, and who takes the greatest care of those men who live piously and honorably. As for the others, he inflicts many punishments on them and separates them from the good. [*TTP* 5 (G III 77/C II 148)]

But Spinoza continues:

> Scripture proves these teachings solely by experience, i.e., by the narratives it relates. It does not give any definitions of these things, but accommodates all its words and arguments to ordinary people's power of understanding. [Ibid.]

It is clear that Spinoza doesn't think that we are supposed to take these things as speculative truths about the nature and action of God that we are supposed to have learned from revelation. I would like to thank Mogens Lærke for calling this passage to my attention. We will see below that these are connected with the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith.

> …if we survey the Letters [of the Apostles] with some attention, we shall see that in religion itself the Apostles indeed agree, but that they differ greatly in the foundations. For to strengthen men in religion, and to show them that salvation depends only on God's grace, Paul taught them that no one can boast of his works, but only of his faith, and that no one is justified by works (see *Romans* 3:27–8)…. James, on the other hand, taught in his letter that man is justified by works and not by faith alone (see *James* 2:24); setting aside all those arguments of Paul, he expressed in a few words the whole doctrine of religion. [*TTP* 11.21 (G III 157/C II 246–7)]

Though he quotes Paul here, it is ultimately James whom he follows:

> [W]e know that the purpose of Scripture was not to teach the sciences. From this we can easily judge that it requires nothing from men but obedience, and condemns only stubbornness, not ignorance. Next, obedience to God consists only in the love of your neighbor—for as Paul says in *Romans* 13:8, he who loves his neighbor in order that he may obey God has fulfilled the Law. [*TTP* 13.6 (G III 168/C II 258)]

This, Spinoza argues, is the true content of scriptural revelation: it is works, not faith that is important here, to obey God by loving your neighbor as yourself. And this, Spinoza says, is *all* that revelation requires of us: not faith, but works, not belief, but obedience.

What, then, of faith? If works are what's important, why bother with faith at all? At the end of *TTP* 13, Spinoza suggests that the important thing about faith is that it *leads* one to works, in particular, to obedience to God. He writes:

> …we must not for a moment believe that opinions [*opiniones*], considered in themselves and without regard to works, have any piety or impiety in them. Instead we should say that a person believes something piously only insofar as his opinions move him to obedience, and impiously only insofar as he takes a license from them to sin or rebel. So, if anyone becomes stubborn by believing truths, he is really impious; on the other hand, if he becomes obedient by believing falsehoods, he has a pious faith. [*TTP* 13.29 (G III 172/C II 263)]

And this, indeed, is just how Spinoza will treat faith in *TTP* 14:

> From these considerations alone it follows very clearly that we are bound by Scriptural command to believe [*credere*] nothing but that which is absolutely necessary to carry out this command [i.e. to obey God etc.]. So this command itself is the unique standard of the whole universal faith. Only through it are we

> to determine all the doctrines [*dogmata*] of faith, namely, those [doctrines] which everyone is bound to embrace. [*TTP* 14.10 (G III 174/C II 265)]

And this, then, is how Spinoza defines faith:

> [Faith must be defined as] thinking such things about God [*de Deo talia sentire*] that if you were not acquainted with them [*ignorantis*], obedience to God would be destroyed, whereas if you are obedient to God, you necessarily have them. [*TTP* 14 (G III 175/C II 266)]

Faith, it seems, is supposed to involve whatever beliefs support works, as it were, the necessary conditions for a person to be obedient to God.[23]

Spinoza goes on to present what appears to be a rather specific set of beliefs as those that one must have to support obedience. These are what he calls the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith.[24] (For the moment I will refer to the *dogmata* as beliefs, though later in the chapter we will examine more carefully how to think of them.) This is an abbreviated version of the list he presents:

I. God exists, i.e. there is a supreme being, supremely just and merciful, or a model of true life. Anyone who doesn't know, or doesn't believe, that God exists cannot obey him or know him as a Judge.
II. He is unique. No one can doubt that this too is absolutely required for supreme devotion, admiration, and love toward God....
III. He is present everywhere, or everything is open to him. If people believed some things were hidden from him, or did not know that he sees all, they would have doubts about the equity of the Justice by which he directs all things—or at least they would not be aware of it.
IV. He has the supreme right and dominion over all things, and does nothing because he is compelled by a law, but acts only according to his absolute good pleasure and special grace. For everyone is absolutely bound to obey him, whereas he is not bound to obey anyone.

[23] The way Spinoza sets out the definition of faith, these conditions, what he will later call "*dogmata*," are necessary conditions for obedience, but not sufficient, as Martin Lin emphasizes in "Faith and Obedience." This is clearly right: a rebellious spirit, for example, might accept those conditions but at the same time obstinately refuse to be obedient. However, the conception of God that Spinoza presents in his *dogmata* of faith will constitute a strong motivation for someone to be obedient to God.

[24] In his translation of the *Ethics*, Curley calls these "the doctrines of the universal faith." While the translation of "*dogmata*" as "doctrines" is perfectly reasonable in this context, I prefer to leave it in the Latin, for reasons that will become clearer later, when I will highlight another use of the term which, I argue, is connected with this one in an interesting way. I also prefer to omit the definite article "the" that Curley uses twice in his translation of the phrase since it makes the collection of doctrines look like the theology of a particular faith or religion. Rather, I think that Spinoza is just setting out beliefs or the like that *any* religion would have to hold in order to support obedience to the imperative that we should love our neighbor as ourselves. It is in this sense that they are universal, I would claim.

V. The worship of God and obedience to him consist only in Justice and Loving-kindness, or in love toward one's neighbor.
VI. Everyone who obeys God by living in this way is saved; the rest, who live under the control of pleasures, are lost. If men did not firmly believe this, there would be no reason why they should prefer to obey God rather than pleasures.
VII. Finally, God pardons the sins of those who repent. No one is without sin. So if we did not maintain this, everyone would despair of his salvation, and there would be no reason why anyone would believe God to be merciful.... [*TTP* 14 (G III 177–8/C II 268–9)][25]

The God presented in the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith is what we might call the "God of Faith." This God is understood as a law-giver who rewards us for following his laws, and punishes us for violating them. This God has the "supreme right and dominion over all things," that is, he has the right to make decrees and to punish and reward; this God is omnipresent, so he "sees all" and thus knows who is behaving well and who is not. Salvation is entirely in God's hands: those who obey God or who repents are granted salvation. And finally, and perhaps most importantly, the only thing this God requires is obedience to the imperative that we should love our neighbor as ourselves. If we are obedient to God, Spinoza claims, then we must hold these seven *dogmata*.[26] And if we deny any of them, then we cannot be obedient, he claims. The view of God in the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith constitutes a necessary condition for obedience, but the *dogmata* also constitute a strong motivation for us to be obedient. While it is still possible to be disobedient, if we have a conception of a God who has commanded us to love our neighbors, and who has the power to see whether his commands have been carried out, and then punish or reward us accordingly, we will be strongly induced to be obedient.

Spinoza emphasizes that it doesn't matter whether or not these seven *dogmata* are true: what is important is that they move us to be obedient, that is, they move us to satisfy [*Obed*] and they are not known to be false:

[25] Earlier, in *TTP* 12, Spinoza presented a shorter list of what he calls there "*fundamentalia*" that are taken to follow from the imperative to love God above all and your neighbor as yourself:

> ...that God exists; that he provides for all; that he is omnipotent; that in accordance with his decree, things go well with the pious, but badly with the wicked; and that our salvation depends only on his grace. [*TTP* 12 (G III 165/C II 255)]

While he doesn't identify these as the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith, arguably they are meant to be a preliminary listing of what he will present in *TTP* 14. There is another preliminary listing of the *dogmata* in the passage from *TTP* 5 (G III 77/C II 148), discussed above in n. 22.

[26] Mogens Lærke has suggested in personal correspondence that there may be other collections of *dogmata* that satisfy this condition. I'm skeptical that Spinoza thought so. These are, after all, presented as *necessary* conditions on obedience.

> [F]aith requires, not so much true *dogmata*, as pious *dogmata*, i.e., *dogmata* which move the heart to obedience, even if many of them do not have even a shadow of the truth. This is true provided the person who accepts them does not know they are false. If he did, he would necessarily be a rebel. [*TTP* 14 (G III 176/C II 267)]

Spinoza also emphasizes that the pious person has considerable latitude in interpreting these *dogmata*; indeed, the pious person is obligated to interpret them in a way that he can accept "without any hesitation" so that they will support obedience:

> It doesn't matter, I say, as far as faith is concerned, how each person understands these and similar things, provided he doesn't conclude that he may take a greater license to sin, or that he should become less obedient to God. In fact, as we've already said, each person is bound to accommodate these *dogmata* of faith to his own power of understanding, and to interpret them for himself, as it seems to him easier for him to embrace [*amplecti*] them without any hesitation, with complete agreement of the heart [*pleno animi consensu*], so that he may obey God wholeheartedly. [*TTP* 14 (G III 178/C II 270)]

But even though Spinoza is willing to admit that the *dogmata* are open to interpretation, if they are to support obedience, the God posited in the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith must be regarded as a law-giver, entitled to decree laws, and both powerful enough and entitled to punish those who violate the laws and reward those who obey them. Even though there is some leeway in the interpretation of the *dogmata*, they have to succeed at motivating obedience. Which means that the concept of God that they posit has to be God the law-giver, what I have called the God of Faith.[27]

[27] In this context, a letter to Willem van Blijenbergh that Spinoza wrote on January 5, 1665, about five years before the publication of the *TTP*, is very relevant. Spinoza wrote:

> …I say that scripture, since it is intended mainly to serve ordinary people, continually speaks in a human fashion. For the people are not capable of understanding high matters. Therefore, I believe that all the things which God has revealed to the prophets to be necessary for salvation are written in the manner of laws. And in this way the prophets wrote a whole parable. First, because God had revealed the means to salvation and destruction, and was the cause of them, they represented him as a king and law-giver. The means, which are nothing but causes, they called laws and wrote in the manner of laws. Salvation and destruction, which are nothing but effects which follow from the means, they represented as reward and punishment. They have ordered all their words more according to this parable than according to the truth. Throughout they have represented God as a man, now angry, now merciful, now longing for the future, now seized by jealousy and suspicion, indeed even deceived by the devil. So the Philosophers, and with them all those who are above the law, i.e., who follow virtue not as a law, but from love, because it is the best thing, should not be shocked by such words. [Spinoza to Blijenbergh, January 5, 1665 (Ep 19, G IV 92–3/C I 360)]

This God of Faith is not exactly the same as what we might call the God of the Bible, the God who is directly represented in the Bible. Unlike that God, who is an actor in the history of the Jews, the God of Faith is a kind of construct, the God presupposed by obedience.[28] But the God of Faith also seems quite different from God as portrayed in the *Ethics*, what may be called the God of Reason. Spinoza writes:

> All the prejudices I here undertake to expose depend on this one: that men commonly suppose that all natural things act, as men do, on account of an end; indeed, they maintain as certain that God himself directs all things to some certain end, for they say that God has made all things for man, and man that he might worship God. [E1app (G II 77/C I 239–40)]

The God of Reason has no ends, acts for no purposes at all, and certainly does not act for *our* sake in any way. And he definitely does not make and enforce laws, as Spinoza notes earlier in the *TTP*. Talking about Moses Spinoza notes that:

> …he imagined God as a ruler, a law-giver, a king, as compassionate, just, etc., when all these things are attributes only of human nature, and ought to be removed entirely from the divine nature. [*TTP* 4 (G III 64/C II 133); cf. *TTP* 19 (G III 231/C II 336)]

One might say that Spinoza's God of Reason is Pascal's God of the Philosophers on steroids, a God deprived of any sort of human qualities whatsoever.[29]

The God of Reason Spinoza presents in the *Ethics* is at least prima facie inconsistent with the God of Faith, the God of the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith.[30]

What Spinoza tells van Blijenbergh here is that the Bible uses the conception of God as a law-giver, an anthropomorphic conception of God, because the common people "are not capable of understanding high matters." This conception of God seems very close to God as portrayed in the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith, interpreted in such a way that they would be efficacious in motivating obedience. In the *TTP*, though, this has been transformed. In the letter to van Blijenbergh it is a reason to dismiss the view of God as a law-giver. In the *TTP*, as I shall argue later in this chapter, it has been transformed into a rather different view: this conception of God will become in the *TTP* an idea of imagination that is closely connected with obedience. (I would like to thank Andrea Sangiacomo for calling this passage to my attention.)

[28] In what I have represented as the preliminary hint of the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith in *TTP* 12, though, Spinoza does say that "Scripture everywhere teaches all these things clearly, and must always have taught them. Otherwise all its other teachings would be hollow and without foundation" [*TTP* 12 (G III 165/C II 255)]. This is not to say, though, that the God of Faith appears *explicitly* in Scripture, the way the God of the Bible does; it is enough that the God of the *dogmata* is implicit everywhere in the Scriptures.

[29] This is an allusion to the line in Pascal's so-called "Memorial," the record of his experience of conversion on November 23, 1654: "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, and not of philosophers and scholars." Pascal/Sellier, *Pensées*, §742, trans. Pascal/Ariew, *Pensées*, §742.

[30] See e.g. Strauss, *Persecution*, 170–1; Laux, *Imagination et Religion*, 198–219; Verbeek, *Exploring*, 28–34; Rosenthal, "Dogmas" (2001) 53, 57.

In the *Ethics* (and, arguably, even in the *TTP*), Spinoza clearly endorses the God of Reason as the true conception of God, and rejects as false anything like the God of the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith, the God who frames laws for us to obey, and who rewards and punishes humans for either satisfying those laws or violating them. What are we to make of this apparent tension between the doctrine of the *Ethics* and that of the *TTP*?

Various commentators have expressed discomfort with the fact that the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith, which Spinoza seems to advance seriously in the *TTP*, might actually be false on Spinoza's own philosophy.[31] Taking advantage of the comment Spinoza made in the passage quoted above that "it doesn't matter…as far as faith is concerned, how each person understands these and similar things, provided he doesn't become less obedient to God" [*TTP* 14 (G III 179/C II 270)], Alexandre Matheron, for example, proposed an elaborate way of interpreting the *dogmata* so that they come out consistent with the radically non-teleological and non-anthropomorphic doctrine of the *Ethics*.[32] But this isn't really to the point: while the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith may be made true by a clever reinterpretation of the terms in which they are framed, the anthropomorphic and teleological interpretation under which the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith are literally false is absolutely central to their efficacy in supporting obedience. It is because the *dogmata* are understood anthropomorphically that the multitude thinks of the fundamental moral precept [*Love*] as a *law*, commanded by a divine God, and thus worthy of obedience. Were they to learn the interpretation that makes them true, that is, the interpretation in accordance with which they would be consistent with strict Spinozist principles, the conception of God would no longer be anthropomorphic and would no longer support obedience. If they were to replace the anthropomorphic God, the ultimate giver of laws with a true picture of God the Eternal, the Rational God of the *Ethics*, then they would have no grounds for obedience to moral principles construed as laws.

It looks here as if we have a problem. On the one hand, Spinoza seems to endorse revelation, and in particular, the idea that one can attain salvation simply

[31] This is particularly true since many commentators believe that the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith are meant to define a new religion of reason or minimal credo. In this connection, it is tempting to see the *dogmata* as what Spinoza has in mind when he proposes as an established religion for an Aristocracy in the *Tractatus Politicus* "a simple and most Universal Religion, such as we described in [the *TTP*]" [TP 8.46 (G III 345/C II 587)]. See, for example, Curley's footnote to this passage in C II. For commentators who have interpreted the seven *Dogmata* as defining a particular universal religion of reason or a minimal credo, see the references cited in Garber, "Religion and State," 128–9. For a more recent version of this reading of the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith, see Lærke, *Freedom of Philosophizing*, 170–5. I think that that this reading is wrong. In Garber, "Religion and State" I argue that the reference in the *TP* to the "Universal Religion" of the *TTP* is not to a religion defined by the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith but to a religion defined by the basic imperative to love one's neighbor as oneself. This could be done through some interpretation of the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith, or it could come through reason. In this chapter I offer a very different way of understanding the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith and their place in Spinoza's project.

[32] See Matheron, *Le Christ*, 94–127.

by being obedient. But on the other hand, [*Obed*], an imperative that we get through revelation, seems to require that the faithful adopt a conception of God which seems clearly inconsistent with the conception of God that we get from reason. It appears, then, that reason and revelation, the *Ethics* and the *TTP*, are inconsistent with one another. If the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith constitute truth claims about the nature of God that the theologian must accept in order to be obedient, then there is a clear clash between philosophy and theology. Given Spinoza's clear endorsement of the life of reason, this has led some to the view that the apparent defense of revelation and obedience in the *TTP* is directed at the theologian and the imperfectly rational common people, while the real message of the *TTP*, directed at the wise, is that we should reject Scripture and revelation.[33] If we accept this reading, then even though the *TTP* seems to be sympathetic to the idea that the theologian, who focuses not on reason and truth but on revelation, and the common people, those who are not capable of the full rationality that the *Ethics* demands, can attain genuine salvation, the hidden message is that they are forever lost. And so what looked like a path to salvation for both the theologian and the *vulgus* is simply closed off.[34]

Or is it? In what follows I would like to sketch a way of thinking about the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith that offers both the theologian and the imperfectly rational some hope for salvation through obedience. To put it briefly, I propose that we should think of the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith not as genuine *beliefs*, considered to be true or false, but as *ideas of the imagination* which serve as a sort of aid to obedience.

5. The *Dogmata* of Universal Faith as Ideas of the Imagination

Let me begin by discussing briefly some interesting suggestions that Spinoza makes in the *Ethics* about the role that imagination can play in governing our behavior. E5p10 reads:

> So long as we are not torn by affects contrary to our nature, we have the power of ordering and connecting the affections of the Body according to the order of the intellect. [E5p10 (G II 287/C I 601)]

[33] The classic statement of this position is in Strauss, *Persecution*. Strauss notes the contradiction between the conception of God that reason demands, and the conception that one finds in the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith [170]. He also notes a number of other contradictions [170–5]. His conclusion is that some of his statements are meant to address the common people and are accommodated to their way of understanding, and some are addressed to the wise [177ff.]. Strauss claims that only the statements that address the wise express Spinoza's own views [177–8, 186–7]. See also Garber, "Strauss." A similar position is argued in Kaplan, "Le salut."

[34] This is close to the reading that I offer in Garber, "Should Spinoza." The position I argue below represents a significant departure from what I argued in the earlier essay.

In the scholium to this proposition, Spinoza explains how the proposition can be of use in making our behavior more rational, and thus controlling the affects. He writes:

> By this power of rightly ordering and connecting the affections of the Body, we can bring it about that we are not easily affected with evil affects. For (by E5p7) a greater force is required for restraining Affects ordered and connected according to the order of the intellect than for restraining those which are uncertain and random. The best thing, then, that we can do, so long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our affects, is to conceive a correct principle of living, or sure maxims of life [*rectam vivendi rationem, seu certa vitae dogmata*], to commit them to memory, and to apply them constantly to the particular cases frequently encountered in life. In this way our imagination will be extensively affected by them, and we shall always have them ready. [E5p10s (G III 487/C I 601)]

It is interesting to note that Spinoza uses the term "*dogmata*," which Curley translates here not as "doctrines" but quite naturally in a rather different way, as "maxims." This suggests a connection between the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith and the *certae vitae dogmata* that is hidden if we follow Curley in translating the term "dogmata" as "doctrines" in one context and "maxims" in the other.[35]

In E5p10s, Spinoza follows the general statement just quoted with a concrete example:

> For example, we have laid it down among the maxims of life [*vitae dogmata*] (see E4p46 and E5p46s) that Hate is to be conquered by Love, or Nobility [*Generositate*], not by repaying it with Hate in return. But in order that we may always have this precept of reason [*rationis praescriptum*] ready when it is

[35] Outside of the key uses of the term in ch. 14 in connection with the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith, see ch. 7 (G III 95/C II 167), translated by Curley as "doctrines"; ch. 11 (G III 152–3/C II 241–2), translated as "authoritative judgments"; ch. 11 (G III 158/C II 247), translated as "doctrines"; ch. 15 (G III 181/C II 273), translated as "doctrine"; ch. 15 (G III 184–5/C II 277–8), translated as "doctrines" and "tenet"; ch. 17 (G III 206/C II 302), translated as "doctrines"; ch. 19 (G III 237–8/C II 342, 344), translated as "doctrines". There is only one occurrence that isn't connected with prophecy, Scripture, or religion, in the title to ch. 18 (G III 221/C II 322), where Spinoza talks about political *dogmata*. There are also two occurrences of "*dogmata*" in the letters, both of which refer to the *dogmata* of religion, and both of which are translated by Curley as "doctrines": Spinoza to Blijenbergh, 28 January 1665 [Ep 21(G IV 132/C I 381)] and Spinoza to Oldenburg, September/October 1675 [Ep 68, (G IV 299/C II 459)]. Outside of these and the occurrences in *TTP* 14 under discussion and in the *Ethics*, which I am about to discuss, these are the only occurrences of the term in Spinoza's writings.

Mogens Lærke has also noticed the connection between the use of "*dogma*" in the Latin of E5p10s and the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith. See *Freedom of Philosophizing*, 47–9. Like me, he rejects Curley's translation, and proposes translating "*dogma*" in E5p10s as "doctrine." But, so far as I can see, he doesn't return to this connection between the E5p10s and *TTP* 14 when he discusses the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith later in *Freedom of Philosophizing*, ch. 9.

> needed, we ought to think about and meditate frequently on the common wrongs of men, and how they may be warded off best by Nobility. For if we join the image of a wrong to the imagination of this maxim [*imaginem injuriae imaginationi hujus dogmatis jungemus*], it will always be ready for us…when a wrong is done to us. [E5p10s (G III 487–8/C I 601–2)]

Now, this example refers back to a proposition in E4:

> He who lives according to the guidance of reason strives, as far as he can, to repay the other's Hate, Anger, and Disdain toward him, with Love, or Nobility. [E4p46 (G II 245/C I 572)]

We don't, of course, always act according to the guidance of reason. What Spinoza is suggesting, I think, is that we should use our imagination to conceive of a variety of different wrongs people might do to us, and associate with each them an appropriate response that shows love or nobility, in some concrete imaginative way. This would be to produce a kind of imaginary correlate of the proposition, an idea of the imagination that reflects the proposition, a "precept of reason." This, I think, is what he means in E5p10 by ordering the affections of the body (which include, by E2p17s, the imagination) according to the order of the intellect. This imaginary correlate of the proposition, what Spinoza calls a *dogma* and Curley translates as "maxim," then, is something that is supposed to guide our action: should we be faced with someone who behaves in hate, anger, or disdain toward us, it guides us toward behaving with love and nobility. Though it corresponds to a true proposition in the *Ethics*, it is not itself really a proposition at all, but an idea of the imagination that is intended to guide our behavior.[36]

[36] There is a certain imprecision in Spinoza's language in the discussion in E5p10s. On the one hand, he talks about how we must:

> …conceive a correct principle of living, or sure maxims of life [*rectam vivendi rationem, seu certa vitae dogmata*], commit them to memory, and apply them constantly to the particular cases frequently encountered in life. [E5p10s (G III 487/C I 601)]

This suggests memorizing what we have found by reason, for example the precept in E4p46, and having it ready to apply when circumstances call for it. But the example that he works out later in the scholium suggests something a little different. Spinoza writes:

> But in order that we may always have this precept of reason [*rationis praescriptum*] ready when it is needed, we ought to think about and meditate frequently on the common wrongs of men, and how they may be warded off best by Nobility. For if we join the image of a wrong to the imagination of this maxim [*imaginem injuriae imaginationi hujus dogmatis jungemus*], it will always be ready for us…when a wrong is done to us. [E5p10s (G III 487–8/C I 601–2)]

Here what is actually influencing our behavior is not the rational prescript itself, but the "imagination of this maxim" united with the imagination of the circumstances in which it might be applied. This suggests that the maxims [*dogmata*] in question in the first quotation in this note are not the conclusions of reason, but their mirror in the imagination, the imaginary application of the rational precept in some exemplary situations. Which is to say, it seems that Spinoza uses the term "*vitae dogmata*"

This suggests a somewhat different reading of the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith from *TTP* 14: instead of genuine beliefs, I suggest, we should think of the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith as ideas of the imagination.[37]

Let us go back to the definition of faith that Spinoza gives:

> [Faith must be defined as] thinking such things about God [*de Deo talia sentire*] that if you were not acquainted with them [*ignorantis*], obedience to God would be destroyed, whereas if you are obedient to God, you necessarily have them. [*TTP* 14 (G III 175/C II 266)]
>
> [*Fides sic definiri debet*] *de Deo talia sentire, quibus ignoratis tollitur erga Deum obedientia, et hac obedientia posita, necessario ponuntur.*

The Latin here is somewhat strange. When talking about faith, one might think that it would be natural to talk about belief. But it is striking that Spinoza seems to be going to some lengths to avoid talking about belief or beliefs in this context. The important verb is "*sentire*," which can be used for what is thought or believed, but is more normally used for what is discerned by the senses or what is felt.[38] The direct object of the verb is the rather vague "*talia*," "such things". The conclusion "if you are obedient to God, you necessarily have them" also doesn't mention what it is that you have explicitly: it is a third-person plural verb which refers back to the "such things" at the beginning of the sentence. What are the

both for precepts of reason and for their imaginary correlates. The point of E5p10 and its scholium, then, seems to be that for most of us, the imaginary correlate is more potent in guiding action than the precept of reason itself.

See also the discussion of E5p10 and its scholium in J. Steinberg, "Practical Utility," 188–92. Steinberg links this idea in Spinoza to ancient Stoicism, the *ars memoriae* and emblematic traditions. There is also an extensive discussion of E5p10s in LeBuffe, *Reason*, 123 and 128–31. See also Yovel, "Incomplete Rationality," 27–9; Rosenthal, "Philosophy of History," 120–4. With the exception of LeBuffe, about whom more below, none of these commentators link this idea in E5p10s to the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith in *TTP* 14, as I will do below.

[37] Laux, *Imagination et religion*, 208–19 draws a connection between the appeal to imagination in E5p10s and the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith. So does LeBuffe, *Reason*, 155–9. LeBuffe groups the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith here with miracles, inadequate ideas of the imagination which can also influence us to behave in accord with what is rational, by loving our neighbor as ourselves. The connection is also mentioned in a tantalizing footnote in Rosenthal, "Dogmas," 72, n. 34. The paper Rosenthal refers to in that note was, unfortunately, never published. None, though, exploit the interesting linguistic connection between the "*vitae dogmata*" (E5p10s) and the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith (*TTP* 14).

[38] Another place where Spinoza uses the verb "*sentire*" in an unusual way to characterize what might be taken to be beliefs is in the notorious passage from E5p23s:

> …we feel and know by experience [*sentimus, experimurque*] that we are eternal. For the mind feels [*sentit*] those things that it conceives in understanding no less than those it has in the memory. For the eyes of the mind, by which it sees and observes [*videt, observatque*] things, are demonstrations themselves. [E5p23s (G II 296/C I 607–8)]

However, I don't want to suggest that Spinoza is using the verb "*sentire*" in the same way in both of these passages.

"such things" in question here? Spinoza seems carefully to avoid any talk here of beliefs and believing.[39]

I would suggest that we not think of the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith as beliefs, strictly speaking. What I mean is this. One might think of theology as involving certain doctrines relating to God and God's relation to the world in general and to human beings in particular. On this conception, theology is the domain in which these doctrines would be discussed and debated, accepted or rejected, interpreted in one way or another. This is what would normally be considered as fixing one's beliefs, determining which doctrines are worthy of belief and which are not. But to treat theological doctrines in this way, as worthy of belief or not, is to be concerned with their truth and falsity. On Spinoza's view, that would be to treat theology as if it were philosophy, which it is not. But if we are not interested in the *dogmata* in *that* way, then how *are* they to be understood?

What I would suggest instead is that somewhat like the *dogmata* in E5p10s, Spinoza's *Dogmata* of Universal Faith should be read as ideas of the imagination. Truth and falsity are not at issue when we are considering the *dogmata* Spinoza introduces in E5p10s. When we contemplate images of people wronging us, and our responding in what Spinoza considers appropriate ways, the question of truth doesn't really arise. For example, if we consider the idea of someone who needlessly insults me, and I respond by reflecting on the other person's unhappiness, and think of myself as offering understanding rather than anger, I am not considering whether or not the situation ever happened or ever will happen: it is an imaginary scene, intended to guide my behavior by reminding myself of the appropriate way to react, in accordance with E4p46. Similarly, when I contemplate God in the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith, as a theologian, where that is understood in the Spinozist fashion, I should be unconcerned with the truth of the various claims about God made in the *dogmata*, but focused on the way that those ideas shape my behavior, in particular, my obedience. The ideas of God represented in the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith are of importance to the theologian not because of their truth or falsity, but because the way they represent God promotes obedience.

In both of the cases under consideration, the *dogmata* of E5p10s and the *dogmata* related to faith, I claim, we are dealing with ideas of imagination that support behaviors of certain sorts, in the one case behaviors that derive from reason, and in the other case behaviors that derive from revelation. However, there are some interesting differences between the two cases, of course. In the case of the *vitae dogmata* in E5p10s, the construction of the imaginative correlate is self-conscious and explicit: it is something we consciously do in order to keep to the

[39] For some other reflections on the curious language of this definition of faith, see Carlisle, *Religion*, 178; Jaquet, "La norme," 214–15. In any case, it isn't obvious what Spinoza could mean by "belief," as that term is normally used. More on this below.

path of reason. But not so in the case of the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith, which Spinoza seems to think of as the direct and unselfconscious result of a commitment to obedience to God. Even so, the relation between the two cases, *dogmata* of E5p10s and the *dogmata* of *TTP* 14, is illuminating, I think.

On my reading, Spinoza thinks of the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith as ideas of the imagination rather than as beliefs, strictly speaking. What I mean by this is that even though they may, indeed, have truth values, Spinoza's theologian is not interested discussion and debate about them: *their truth values are not at issue for Spinoza's theologian.* What *is* at issue is simply their relation to obedience. I think that this underscores the fact that Spinoza's conception of theology and the theologian is something of a polemical fiction: theologians in Spinoza's day were not interested only in obedience. This is amply shown by the bitter theological disputes that led to endless discussion, condemnations, and punishments, and the violence of wars that had their origin in religious difference. Indeed, it may be difficult if not impossible to conceive of someone entertaining the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith while setting aside any interest in their truth values. But that said, if we are to explicate the argument of the *TTP* properly, we must assume Spinoza's conception of theology and the theologian, paradoxical as that conception may be.

Let us return to ideas of the imagination and the main thread of the argument. Even though truth and falsity are irrelevant to the function ideas of the imagination have as supporting obedience, there is a way in which they are, in a sense, belief-like.[40] The belief-like aspect of Spinoza's view of the imagination comes out most clearly in E2p49s, when Spinoza considers Descartes's account of judgment and error at some length. For Descartes, judgment is a consequence of the faculty of will affirming an idea in the intellect, and error arises when the will acts improperly.[41] Spinoza, of course, is very much opposed to Descartes's account. Descartes's account is based explicitly on the view that the mind has two faculties, the intellect, which perceives ideas, and the will, which affirms or denies them. Spinoza, though, completely denies that there is a faculty of will [E2p48 (G II 129/C I 482)]. For Spinoza, true ideas *affirm themselves*, as it were: "In the Mind there is no volition, or affirmation and negation, except that which the idea involves insofar as it is an idea" [E2p49 (G II 130/C I 484)]. True and adequate ideas exhibit the strongest affirmation. And so, Spinoza holds, "he who has a true

[40] On the notion of belief in Spinoza and the view that all ideas come with some sort of affirmation, see Lin, "Affirmation and Judgment," 32–42. Lin gives a good survey of different attempts to pin down what Spinoza might mean by belief in the literature, and comes to a rather pessimistic conclusion:

> I propose that we abandon the attempt to define a Spinozistic notion of belief from his views of seemingly related topics such as affirmation, denial, and doubt and accept that Spinoza's psychology is belief-free. [Lin, "Affirmation and Judgment," p. 42]

I tend to agree. For that reason, I prefer to talk about ideas of the imagination as belief-like, rather than beliefs.

[41] See Meditation IV (AT VII 56–7/CSMK II 39–40).

idea at the same time knows [*scit*] that he has a true idea and cannot doubt the truth of the thing" (E2p43). That is to say, "truth is its own standard" [E2p43s (G II 124/C I 480). Cf. TIE 35–6 (G II 15/C I 18)]. But that isn't to say that people can't entertain false or inadequate ideas. Spinoza writes:

> …[A] false idea, insofar as it is false, does not involve certainty. When we say that a man rests [*acquiescere*] in false ideas and does not doubt them, we do not, on that account, say that he is certain, but only that he does not doubt, or that he rests in false ideas because there are no causes to bring it about that his imagination wavers. [E2p49s (G II 131/C I 485)]

In this case, a false idea still affirms itself, though not as strongly as a true and adequate idea does.

In this way, ideas of the imagination, like all ideas, come with a kind of built-in affirmation. This is nicely illustrated by Spinoza's discussion of the Cartesian idea that one can consider an idea of the imagination in the intellect without affirming it. The Cartesian proposes that "someone who feigns [*fingit*] a winged horse does not on that account grant [*concedit*] that there is a winged horse, i.e., he is not on that account deceived unless at the same time he grants that there is a winged horse" [E2p49s (G II 132–3/C I 487)]. This is Spinoza's response:

> …[L]et us conceive a child imagining a [winged][42] horse, and not perceiving anything else. Since this imagination involves the existence of the horse…, and the child does not perceive anything else that excludes the existence of the horse, he will necessarily regard [*contemplabitur*] the horse as present. Nor will

[42] I am putting the word "winged [*alatum*]" in brackets here because recent scholarship has called into question whether it belongs in this text. The attribution of wings to the horse in this passage is not found either in the text of the *Opera posthuma* (OP 90) or in the Dutch translation in the *Nagelate Schriften* (NS 102). The recent discovery of the Vatican MS of the *Ethics* (Spinoza, *Vatican Manuscript*), which lacks "winged" in that passage (see *Vatican Manuscript*, 166, l. 15) confirms those readings. The "winged horse," though is found in a slightly earlier passage, both in OP and in NS (G II 132–3/C I 487; cf. OP 88–9 and NS 100), and a slightly later passage of E2p49s, again both in OP and NS (G II 134/C I 489; cf. OP 90–1 and NS 102–3). Late nineteenth-century editors, seeing the winged horse in the later passage, "corrected" the earlier passage by adding wings to the horse. Gebhardt followed this emendation. More recent editors have gone back to the readings in the OP, and thus the text in O IV 234 gives just "*equum*" and not "*equum alatum*" in this passage. The original argument for currently accepted reading was made in Cristofolini, "Piccole chiose," 137–9, who argued, apparently independently of the discovery of the Vatican MS, that in the later text where the winged horse appears, the appeal to wings on a horse had a point to make that wasn't present in the other text, and so there was no reason to change the reading of the earlier passage found in OP and NS. For further discussion of this issue, see Totaro, "Young Spinoza," 328 and O IV 543, n. 128. The change is philosophically significant, I think. In the passage quoted here, Spinoza seems to be dealing with either a child imagining a horse, or a child having a visual representation of the horse at a given time, which may disappear when the horse leaves the frame of the child's vision; cf. E2p17c, to which Spinoza refers in this context, which deals with both sense perception and pure imagination. In the passage in which the winged horse appears in OP and NS, the child seems to be contemplating a fantastical imagination.

> he be able to doubt its existence, though he will not be certain of it. [E2p49s (G II 134/C I 488)][43]

Note here that Spinoza doesn't say that the boy *believes* or *judges* that the horse is present: he only *regards* the horse as present. As I read Spinoza here, on the basis of the passage from E2p49s quoted above, and that appeared a few pages earlier in the text of the scholium, one can understand the boy to be "resting in" the presence of the horse, to use Spinoza's locution, that is, taking for granted that the horse is present. This is exactly the position of Spinoza's theologian with respect to the God of Faith. Insofar as he hasn't worked through the arguments of the *Ethics* that show the inadequacy of the idea of God the law-giver and lacks the true idea of the God of Reason, an idea that "excludes the existence" of the God of Faith, by virtue of having that idea of imagination he is in a state of "regarding" (though not *believing*) the God of Faith as existing. Nor does Spinoza think that this involves error:

> …I grant that no one is deceived insofar as he perceives, i.e., I grant that the imaginations of the Mind, considered in themselves, involve no error. But I deny that a man affirms nothing insofar as he perceives. For what is perceiving a winged horse other than affirming wings of the horse? [E2p49s (G II 134/C I 489)]

Though there is an *affirmation* of a horse with wings, the boy is not deceived nor is he in error in "resting in" the horse and "regarding" it as present. And similarly, one supposes, though the theologian who has in his mind the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith has an idea that *affirms* a God who is a law-giver, that theologian is not deceived nor is he in error in "resting in" such a God and "regarding" it as present.

But the situation changes when we learn more about either horses or about God. The passage just quoted continues as follows:

> For if the Mind perceived nothing else except the winged horse, it would regard it as present to itself, and would not have any cause of doubting its existence, or any faculty of dissenting, unless either the imagination of the winged horse were joined to an idea which excluded the existence of the same horse, or the Mind perceived that its idea of a winged horse was inadequate. And then either it will necessarily deny the horse's existence, or it will necessarily doubt it. [E2p49s (G II 134/C I 489)]

When the child imagining the winged horse comes to have an idea that is inconsistent with the winged horse (when he turns to see the horse he thought was

[43] Spinoza is, of course, drawing on the account of imagination in E2p17&c&s.

winged and discovers that what he thought were wings were just the branches of a tree behind the horse) then he will no longer affirm wings of the horse. If, on the other hand, the child were to learn that biologically having wings is somehow inconsistent with the structure of horses and thus that the very idea of a winged horse is inadequate, then he would come to doubt his imagination of a winged horse. In either case, his affirmation of the imagined winged horse would be undermined. One can say something similar about the theologian contemplating the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith. Should he learn that the idea of the God of Faith was incoherent, because, say, it is incoherent for God to be a law-giver, then he would be in a state where he would "necessarily doubt" the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith. And should he come to grasp the true idea of God, the God of Reason Spinoza sets out in the *Ethics*, an idea of God that "excludes" the God of Faith, then he will "necessarily deny" the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith. Under these circumstances, the theologian will no longer "rest in" the idea of God the law-giver and the God of Faith is no longer affirmed.[44]

And under these circumstances, the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith can no longer support obedience, I would claim. That is to say, the ability of the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith to support obedience strictly depends on the fact that the *dogmata* affirm the existence of the God of Faith. This is, I think, implicit in a passage from *TTP* 14 that we discussed earlier. Spinoza writes:

> …[F]aith requires, not so much true *dogmata*, as pious *dogmata*, i.e., *dogmata* which move the heart to obedience, even if many of them do not have even a shadow of the truth. This is true provided the person who embraces [*amplectitur*] them does not know they are false [*falsa esse ignoret*]. If he did, he would necessarily be a rebel.…[*TTP* 14 (G III 176/C II 267)]

Note here that Spinoza doesn't say that the person of faith has to accept the *dogmata* as *true*: what is important is that they do not know them to be *false*. If the theologian, the person of faith, knew that the God of Faith does not exist, or knew that the idea of the God of Faith were false and inadequate, then the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith would no longer *affirm* that the God of faith exists, and in that situation, the theologian "would necessarily be a rebel," that is, the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith will no longer be efficacious in supporting obedience. But, on the other hand, as long as the theologian doesn't *know* that they are false, he will "rest in" the God of faith, and the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith will "affirm" the God of Faith. And the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith will support obedience.

In this situation it is crucial to note the distinction between affirmation—a property of ideas of imagination—and truth. Even false and inadequate ideas affirm.

[44] On doubt in Spinoza, see e.g. Bolton, "Cartesian Doubt"; Beavers and Rice, "Doubt and Belief"; D. Steinberg, "Method and Doubt."

However, the affirmation can be undermined under appropriate circumstances, leading to either doubt (in the case of coming to know that a given idea is inadequate or false) or denial (in the case of coming to hold an idea that excludes a given idea). As long as we don't *know* the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith to be false, the ideas of imagination that embody the God of Faith can affirm the existence of the God who is a law-giver and support obedience.

6. Conclusion: The Philosopher, the Theologian, and the *Vulgus*

We can now return to a question raised earlier: does the philosopher undermine the theologian? Is this Spinoza's intention in the *TTP*, to show that the theologian's project is doomed? Does the *Ethics* and the conception of God that Spinoza develops there undermine the possibility of salvation through obedience for both the theologian and the *vulgus*? My answer will be "no", at least as Spinoza understands the two categories, that of philosophy and that of theology.

Now, the God of Faith, as I characterized it above, the God in question in the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith is, indeed, in competition with the God of Reason, the God of the *Ethics*. However, I would argue, the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith as the theologian holds them are not exactly in competition with the philosopher's arguments in the *Ethics*. The existence of the God of Reason and all of its properties are established in the *Ethics* though axioms, definitions, and propositions: they are adequate ideas which are completely certain and incapable of doubt: "he who has a true idea at the same time knows that he has a true idea and cannot doubt the truth of the thing" (E2p43). And as a philosopher, the philosopher is interested precisely in their truth. The *Dogmata* of Universal Faith, on the other hand, have a kind of shadowy status: if I am right, they are not to be regarded as *beliefs*, strictly speaking, but as ideas of the imagination. They are, in a sense, a consequence of accepting through revelation the imperative of obedience: it is because the theologian has accepted the obligation to obey God that he is obligated to "think" [*sentire*] of God as a law-giver. This is not a belief that he arrives at through reasoning and reflection, but it is a simple consequence of his commitment to being obedient to God: "if you are obedient to God, you necessarily" think [*sentire*] of God in this way.[45] As an idea of the imagination of God, this idea necessarily comes with a kind of affirmation, in just the same way that the child's imagination of a winged horse comes with a kind of affirmation. This is true, at least, as long as the theologian doesn't know that his idea of God is inadequate. But Spinoza's theologian "rests in" [*acquiescere*] that idea of God in just

[45] The reference here is to the definition of faith in *TTP* 14 (G III 175/C II 266) given above which, as I have pointed out, carefully avoids the language of belief.

the same way as the child in Spinoza's example "rests in" the idea of the winged horse: it is not a self-conscious judgment.[46] (This is not to deny that it *could* be a self-conscious judgment, but there is no reason why this possibility should undermine Spinoza's position. In the case in which it is a self-conscious judgment, the theologian will be playing the philosopher's game, but badly: the judgment that the God of Faith exists can be said to be *wrong* in that case and the philosopher can be said to refute the theologian.) Nor does Spinoza's theologian qua theologian really *care* whether it is true or not. Spinoza's theologian is concerned with obedience and obedience alone: his attention is focused on obedience to God and loving his neighbor as himself. To learn that there are others—philosophers—who think his way of conceiving God is incorrect won't move him. Perhaps having heard about someone else's views of God he might grant that he could be wrong about that. But that by itself wouldn't be enough for him to give up his commitment to obedience to God and on that basis, loving his neighbor as himself; the philosophical question about the nature of God is of no importance to the theologian, as Spinoza conceives of him: "…it doesn't matter, as far as faith is concerned, what God…is, whether he is fire, spirit, light, thought, etc., or how he is a model of true life ….It's all the same, whatever each person maintains about these things" [*TTP* 14 (G III 178/C II 269)]. Whether the theologian gets such matters about the nature of God right or wrong is irrelevant to him: the only thing that is important is piety and obedience:

> …[A] person believes something piously only insofar as his opinions move him to obedience, and impiously only insofar as he takes a license from them to sin or rebel. So, if anyone becomes obstinate by believing truths, he is really impious; on the other hand, if he becomes obedient by believing falsehoods, he has a pious faith. [*TTP* 13 (G III 172/C II 263)]

In this way the philosopher's critique of the theologian's idea of God is irrelevant to him: as long as he confines himself to the domain of theology, philosophy has no standing.

But what *would* induce Spinoza's theologian to give up obedience is coming to appreciate the arguments Spinoza advances in the *Ethics*, that is, the formation of a genuinely adequate idea of God:

> …the divine laws seem to us to be laws, or things instituted, just as long as we do not know their cause. But when this is known, they thereby cease to be laws, and we embrace them not as laws, but as eternal truths. That is, obedience passes into love, which proceeds from true knowledge as necessarily as light does from the sun. [*TTP* 16, ADN 34 (G III 264/C II 293n21)]

[46] The reference here is to the passage from E2p49s (G II 131/C I 485), discussed above.

Having the true and adequate idea of God, and working through the arguments of E4p37s, Spinoza's theologian would then know the cause/reason why we should love our neighbor as ourselves. This would then make it impossible for him to continue to be obedient. If Spinoza's philosophical psychology is right, the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith would no longer affirm the existence of the God of Faith, and would no longer support obedience: insofar as the God of Reason is inconsistent with the conception of God as a law-giver, Spinoza's philosophical psychology entails that the God of Faith is no longer efficacious, just as understanding that horses in general or this horse in particular lacks wings chases away the child's imagination of a winged horse. But in that circumstance, the theologian would no longer be a theologian, but a philosopher. And he would no longer need obedience to love his neighbor: using the kind of reasoning Spinoza gives in E4p37s, he would see directly that the obligation is a truth of reason.[47] Nor would he need obedience for salvation: he would attain salvation through reason and knowledge of the third kind.

In this way we can say that philosophy and the philosopher don't make it impossible for Spinoza's theologian to maintain his commitment to obedience, and even his commitment to the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith: though the philosopher can refute the theologian's conception of God, he cannot derail the theologian's project. As long as the theologian maintains his focus on obedience, and rejects the question of truth, that is, as long as he remains a theologian in the

[47] In a very interesting essay, "Spinoza's Faith," Martin Lin has presented an argument to show that the philosopher can follow the way of obedience. This argument depends on what Spinoza argues in *TTP* 19. He writes:

> Suppose I now show that justice and loving-kindness can acquire the force of law and of a command only from the right of the state. Then since the right of the state belongs only to the supreme powers [*potestates*], it will be easy for me to conclude that Religion acquires the force of law only by the decree of those who have the right to rule, and that God has no special kingdom over men except through those who have sovereignty. [*TTP* 19 (G III 229/C II 333)]

Lin argues that even the philosopher can be obedient to the moral law, insofar as he lives in a civil society where the sovereign has legislated the moral law as civil law. To the extent that a philosopher obeys the moral law because it is a civil law, that philosopher can be "obedient" without having the philosophically false conception of God embodied in the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith. While the argument is ingenious, it doesn't undermine the point that I am trying to make. First of all, in the circumstance that Lin envisions, the obedience in question would be obedience not (directly) to God, but to the sovereign who commanded them. Secondly, the obedience would depend on happening to live in a civil society in which the sovereign happened to legislate those imperatives as civil law. One can certainly conceive of a sovereign who legislated a very different code of behavior. And finally, in his account of the role that the sovereign powers have in establishing divine law as civil law, Spinoza is very clear to say that he is "speaking specifically about the [external] exercise of piety and about the external practice of religion, not about piety itself and the internal worship of God, or the means by which the mind is disposed, internally, to worship God wholeheartedly" [*TTP* 19 (G III 229/C II 333)]. My concern here is not with the external practice of piety, but with "piety itself." In the situation in which the sovereign legislates a code of behavior different for the one Spinoza finds in Scripture, the commitment to the internal exercise of piety can differ greatly from the exercise of obedience to the sovereign.

sense that Spinoza understands that term, the philosopher cannot undermine his project. What is important to the theologian is not what we think, but how we act:

> Faith therefore grants everyone the greatest freedom to philosophize, so that without wickedness he can think [*sentire*] whatever he wishes about anything. Faith condemns as heretics and schismatics only those who teach opinions which encourage obstinacy, hatred, quarrels and anger. [*TTP* 14 (G III 179–80/C II 271)]

Furthermore, since reason leads us to love our neighbor like ourselves, there is nothing in philosophy that theologian should condemn, even though the philosopher rejects the conception of God that the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith represents.

In this way, Spinoza can maintain the independence of philosophy and theology. But even so, there are limitations to Spinoza's thesis that are worth noting. First of all, as I noted earlier, the argument strongly depends on Spinoza's rather idiosyncratic definition of theology and the theologian. It is because of his insistence that philosophy just deals with truth, and theology just deals with obedience, that the two are completely separate. One might well argue that the complete separation of the two domains is historically highly unrealistic. In particular, despite what Spinoza says, many who identified themselves as theologians were deeply committed to the truth of their theological doctrines. To that extent, the arguments for the independence of philosophy and theology that Spinoza offers in the *TTP* can give little comfort to either philosophers or theologians among Spinoza's readers. One might object that instead of showing that philosophy and theology *as generally understood* are independent, Spinoza is establishing their independence by changing the subject and redefining what theology is.

Furthermore, it is important to note that philosophy and theology even as Spinoza understands them are still incompatible in an important way. Because he cannot accept the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith "without any hesitation and with complete agreement of the heart," Spinoza's philosopher cannot be obedient. And so the philosopher cannot be a theologian. And similarly, since Spinoza's theologian cannot accept the philosopher's conception of God without having to give up the *Dogmata* of Universal Faith properly interpreted and thus obedience, the theologian cannot be a philosopher. If there is a contradiction between philosophy and theology, it is simply that one has to choose sides: one cannot be both a philosopher and a theologian. For Spinoza, philosophy and theology are thus parallel but distinct paths to (parallel and distinct kinds of) salvation: "…Theology is not bound to be the handmaid of reason, nor reason the handmaid of theology, but…each rules its own domain" [*TTP* 15 (G III 184/C II 277)]. One might say that philosophy and theology are simply incommensurable projects, projects whose goals and values are fundamentally different, and not in competition with

one another. Though neither project can constrain the other, nor can one refute the other, the philosopher and the theologian live in utterly different worlds.[48]

So much for the philosopher and the theologian. But what then is left for the *vulgus*, the common person, the imperfectly rational person who is neither philosopher nor theologian, but who is listening in on this conversation? Spinoza doesn't think that the *vulgus* is fully capable of reason, and thus salvation through reason is closed to him, at least while he remains a *vulgus*. But, on the other hand, *everyone* is capable of obedience:

> I judge the utility, even necessity, of Sacred Scripture, or revelation, to be very great. We can't perceive by the natural light that simple obedience is a path to salvation. Only revelation teaches that this happens, by a special grace of God, which we cannot grasp by reason. It follows that Scripture has brought great comfort to mortals. Everyone, without exception, can obey. But only a very few…can acquire a habit of virtue from the guidance of reason alone. So, if we didn't have this testimony of Scripture, we would doubt nearly everyone's salvation. [*TTP* 15 (G III 188/C II 281–2)]

The common person can then attain a kind of salvation through obedience, in the domain of theology and the theologian.[49] Nor does Spinoza the philosopher seem to think that there is anything illegitimate about that at all.[50]

[48] For a rather different account of Spinoza's two domains, or as he calls them, his two kingdoms, see LeBuffe, *Reason*, 159–76. LeBuffe sees a tension between the two domains, and suggests a real conflict. But he sees the resolution of that tension through the evolution of the theologian and the *vulgus* to fuller and fuller rationality:

> …the religious become progressively more rational without losing faith by cultivating reason even as they continue to be moved by devotion. They only cast off highly imaginative religious ideas as a final step, when reason is already a motive for them that is sufficiently powerful to guarantee behavior by a fixed plan. [167–8]

And so, LeBuffe writes, "[e]very citizen is guided by religion or reason, but most citizens are guided by both and in good circumstances, are in the process of transition to greater and greater rationality" [169]. In this way "the two kingdoms typically govern at once in each citizen's mind" [174]. As attractive as this idea may be, I don't think it is Spinoza's: "Everyone, without exception, can obey. But only a very few…can acquire a habit of virtue from the guidance of reason alone" [*TTP* 15 (G III 188/C II 281–2)].

[49] Here I disagree with J. Thomas Cook in "Did Spinoza Lie." The issue derives from an anecdote in Colerus's life of Spinoza. Colerus wrote:

> It happened one day that his landlady asked him whether he believed that she could be saved in the religion she professed: He answered, "Your religion is a good one, you need not look for any other, nor doubt that you may be saved in it, provided, whilst you apply yourself to Piety, you live at the same time a peaceable and quiet life." [Quoted on p. 209]

In the end, Cook argues that Spinoza was stretching the truth, or even lying to his landlady. He attributes to Spinoza "the necessity of adapting one's teaching to the level of understanding of one's audience" (231). This, I think, amounts to a version of the notorious Straussian position on dissimulation as a rhetorical strategy as discussed in Strauss, *Persecution*. But, as I have argued, Spinoza's position in the *TTP* offers a genuine defense of the independence of philosophy and theology, and a defensible way to salvation through obedience that is more than simply speaking to the prejudices of the common person.

[50] I have been wrestling with this essay for quite a long time, and with the issues in it for even longer. In the course of things, I have come to change my mind on many significant questions. A number of colleagues and students have been very generous with their criticism of earlier drafts of

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Reason and Scripture in the *Ethics* and *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

Jarig Jelles and Preface to the *Nagelate schriften van B.D.S.* (1677)

Russ Leo

1. Introduction

Baruch Spinoza's friend Jarig Jelles delivers an original and comprehensive account of the philosopher's thought in the Preface [*Voorreeden*] to the posthumous Dutch edition of Spinoza's writings: the *Nagelate schriften van B.D.S.* (1677), which appeared shortly after the philosopher's death. Jelles composed this introductory essay in Dutch before Lodewijk Meijer rendered it into Latin (with some notable changes) for publication in the Latin *Opera posthuma* (1677) which appeared in the same year.[1] Since the seventeenth century, readers who have turned to the Preface have generally done so to corroborate the details of Spinoza's life. But the Preface offers much more than biographical detail. Indeed, Jelles's Preface affords us insight into how contemporary readers—and in this case, Collegiant readers in Amsterdam—understood Spinoza's thought.[2] Jelles is remarkably attentive to how Spinoza's corpus fits together. He even explicitly identifies the author of the posthumous collection as "B.D.S" and attributes to him the anonymous *Tractatus theologico-politicus* [*TTP*], a work in which (he

[1] Despite emendations and additions, Lodewijk Meijer generally retained the sense of the Dutch work when he translated Jelles's Preface into Latin for the *Opera posthuma* (1677). Nevertheless, I treat these as separate works here and emphasize Jelles's Dutch preface throughout. I refer almost exclusively to Akkerman's facing-page edition of the prefaces; translations are my own, and I refer to it throughout simply as "Preface." See "Preface," 207–10; Steenbakkers, *Spinoza's* Ethica, 17–20, 64; and my forthcoming critical edition and translation of the *Preface*.

[2] Akkerman's is the first critical edition of either the Latin or the Dutch text; his is, moreover, the only edition to devote sustained critical attention to the differences between Jelles's text and Meijer's translation. There are indeed several recent editions of the Preface—most of which, however, translate from Meijer's Latin. For instance, the Preface is available in two French versions. Maxime Rovere interpolates sections of the Dutch text into his translation of the Latin text, while Bernard Pautrat seems to translate from the Latin alone. See Jelles and Meijer, *Spinoza par ses amis*; and Jelles, *Préface*. Emilia Giancotti renders the *Preface* into Italian from the Latin, while Roberto Bordoli and Filippo Mignini translate several sections of Jelles's Dutch Preface into Italian. See Spinoza, *Etica*, 427–43; and Colerus and Lucas, *Le vite di Spinoza*, 113–17.

says) "very many profound and considerable things concerning theology and Holy Scripture as well as the true foundations of a republic are treated."[3] And while he is not the first to identify Spinoza as the author of the anonymous work, Jelles is perhaps the first to articulate, at least in print, how the philosopher's *TTP* relates to his *Ethics* and to his philosophy at large. Moreover, across the Preface, Jelles also presents Spinoza's philosophy as consistent with a "rational religion." While giving readers a sense of what he means by "reason," Jelles attempts to illustrate, with frequent reference to the *Ethics*, that Spinoza, as well as Christ and the Apostles, all teach precisely what reason prescribes. They agree with respect to "the moral doctrines of the Christian Religion," and they each teach everything that is necessary to know for salvation as well as "everything that we are obliged to do in order to be saved"—all of which is evident in nature and may be understood by the light of reason alone.[4]

Spinoza's philosophy, Jelles argues, neither contradicts nor challenges the basic principles of Christianity. On the contrary, careful readers will recognize a rational religion in the *Ethics* that also subtends what might otherwise appear as a critique of religion in the *TTP*.[5] In fact, Jelles claims:

> what our writer demonstrates as prescribed by reason itself with respect to the rule of living well and the supreme good of man corresponds exactly with what our Savior and the Apostles taught. Likewise, the ethical teachings of our Christian Religion, or everything that we are obliged to do in order to be saved, are entirely expressed in this. And finally, that the desire to try to understand the truth of the articles of Christian doctrine, and to live and act in accordance with it, agrees with Holy Scripture and the Christian religion in every respect.[6]

In other words, Jelles insists that Spinoza, Christ, and the Apostles all teach precisely what "reason, or the understanding, prescribes" [*Reden, of 't Verstant voorschrijft*]; they share an ethics that Jesus summarized when he asserted that, in order to acquire salvation, "God must be loved above all, and our neighbors as ourselves."[7] In the Preface, however, Jelles derives these principles solely from the *Ethics*. Speaking to those who are "neither satisfied with the appearance of truth nor moved by authority," who desire "sound reasoning and infallible truths," Jelles turns to *loci* in Scripture only to confirm what reason makes evident.[8] He thus reframes Spinoza's claim that "although religion, as the Apostles preached it, by relating the simple story of Christ, does not fall under reason, nevertheless, by the

[3] "Preface," 218–19. Jelles identifies "B.D.S." as the author of the 1664 *Renati des Cartes Principia philsophiae* (*DPP*), a text that Spinoza published under his own name.
[4] "Preface," 226–7, 238–9.
[5] In this sense, Jelles looks forward to Carlos Fraenkel's argument concerning Spinoza's vision of Christianity as a philosophical religion. See Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions*, 213–81.
[6] "Preface," 238–9. [7] "Preface," 226–7. [8] "Preface," 215–16.

natural light everyone can easily appreciate its most important themes, which, like the whole of Christ's teaching, consist chiefly of moral lessons" [*TTP* 11 (G III 156/C II 245)]. Reading the *TTP* by way of the *Ethics*, Jelles presents Christianity as a rational religion and marshals passages from the *Ethics* to illustrate the degree to which Spinoza himself acknowledges a rational religion that corresponds to Christianity, albeit a minimal Christianity at odds with contemporary alternatives among the various established churches.[9]

2. The Rationality of Christianity and the Collegiants

It should not surprise us that Jelles affirms the reasonableness of Christianity in the Preface to the *Nagelate schriften*. He does this in his *Belydenisse des algemeenen en christelyken geloofs, vervattet in een brief aan N.N* as well—that is, in his *Profession of the Universal and Christian Faith, Contained in a Letter to N. N.*, a work that appeared posthumously in print in 1684 but which he sent to Spinoza around 1673.[10] The printer of the *Belydenisse*, Jan Rieuwertsz (a fellow Collegiant who, not incidentally, played a prominent role in the publication of the *TTP*, the *Opera posthuma*, and the *Nagelate schriften*), underlines Jelles's commitments to philosophy, presenting the work as a rational antidote to sectarian strife.[11] Indeed, in his *Belydenisse* Jelles presents nothing less than "a universal confession, acceptable to all Christians," a minimal creed that only contains "what *necessarily must be known*, what *is entirely true and certain*, what *is certified and corroborated by testimonies*, and finally, what, so far as possible, *is expressed in the same words and ways of speaking the Holy Spirit used*."[12] These core tenets are not particular to Scripture. They are evident in nature and may be apprehended by the light of reason. Of God's attributes, for instance, Jelles indicates that while Scripture testifies that he is "an absolutely infinite and most perfect being," one can "be entirely certain of this through natural reason and infallibly know that it is true."[13] Moreover, Jelles repeatedly identifies Christ as "internal reason, or the

[9] "Preface," 246–7. [10] See Curley's remarks in C II 367–8.

[11] Rieuwertsz printed the confession together with Pieter Balling's 1662 work *The Light upon the Candlestick* [*Het licht op den kandelaar*] in 1684. In the shared volume Balling's work seems to confirm Jelles's belief in a rational Christianity, where the light—that is, "*The Light of Truth, the true Light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world*"—is nothing other than "a clear and distinct knowledge of truth in the understanding of every man, by which he is so convinced of the Being and Quality of things, that he cannot possibly doubt thereof.... This Light is the inward ear by which alone, and by no other, the voice of God that is the Truth, can be heard." Balling, *The Light*, 3, 4–5, 8–9; Balling, *Het licht*, 9–10, 11, 17. On Rieuwertsz, see Steenbakkers, *Spinoza's* Ethica, 16, 65–6; Manusov-Verhage, "Jan Rieuwertsz," 237–50; and Jagersma and Dijkstra, "Uncovering Spinoza's Printers," 279–80.

[12] Jelles, *Belydenisse*, 6–9; translations into English are mine. See also Ep 48A, Jelles to Spinoza, early 1673 (C II 398). Ep 48A as found in Curley's translation is not a letter, strictly speaking, but a redacted version of Jelles's *Belydenisse*. See Curley's explanation in C II 367. I alter Curley's translation.

[13] Jelles, *Belydenisse*, 24–5.

understanding" [*d'innerlijke Reden, of 't Verstant*] through which we apprehend the truth; he affirms that the Holy Spirit is "nothing other than pure intellectual knowledge" [*geen ander dan zuivere verstandelijke kennis*] and asserts that the truth of Scripture cannot contradict nature.[14] A rational religion, this minimal Christianity is not particular to any church or creed.

In this sense the *Belydenisse* is a faithful expression of Jelles's Collegiant beliefs and practices. Jelles was a member of the Mennonite congregation led by Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan, another Collegiant who, according to Andrew Fix, affirmed that "any religious association in the corrupt world of his day could be nothing more than a gathering of like-minded people freely confessing their similar beliefs," who "emphatically rejected the idea that his own congregation or any other could rightfully claim to be the one and only true church of Christ on earth."[15] Like many seventeenth-century *Chrétiens sans Église*, Galenus and Jelles alike were attracted to Collegiant meetings in Amsterdam where various members—Mennonites, Remonstrants, Jews, Socinians, Quakers, and a variety of mystics, spiritualists, and rationalists—would discuss reason, Scripture, and the relationship between philosophy and religion, specifically Christianity.[16] By the late 1650s, Jelles was active in the Collegiant discussions that were often held in Rieuwertzs's print shop.[17] There, in search of truth in the spirit of friendship, not under the aegis of any church or preacher or other authority figure, Jelles developed his theses on reason and Christianity. Whether or not Spinoza himself participated in Collegiant meetings, Jelles certainly shared his ideas with Spinoza, a close friend with whom he corresponded until the philosopher's death. Spinoza and Jelles had much in common. Like Spinoza, Jelles worked as a merchant in Amsterdam before retiring in pursuit of truth and understanding. Indeed, in a brief biographical sketch at the end of his *Belydenisse* (probably written by Rieuwertsz) we learn that Jelles, after:

> recognizing that scraping together money and goods could not make his soul happy, at his busiest and most lucrative point he handed his shop over to an honorable man, abruptly ceased his work there, and, without ever getting married, retreated to silence outside all of the tumult of the world in order to train himself in *the knowledge of truth*, *which accords with piety* [*de kennisse der waarheid, die na de Godzaligheit is te oeffenen*], and to acquire wisdom.[18]

[14] Jelles, *Belydenisse*, 42–3, 46–7, 106–7, 134–7.

[15] Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 111.

[16] On the development of the Collegiant movement in Amsterdam see Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans église*, 166–249; Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 41–6, 84–112.

[17] Nadler, *Spinoza*, 372–3; Manusov-Verhage, "Jan Rieuwertsz," 241–2. On the history of the Collegiants, particularly in Amsterdam, see Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*; Quatrini, *Adam Boreel*; and van Slee, *Rijnsburger Collegianten*, 135–77.

[18] Jelles, *Belydenisse*, 230–1. Curley translates part of this as Ep 48B, in C II 403. In his Preface, Jelles introduces Spinoza in a similar way, as a man who, eschewing "all of the worldly cares and concerns which usually impede the search for truth," even decamped from Amsterdam to pursue "his meditations" [*zijn bespiegelingen*]. "Preface," 216–17.

To practice piety, Rieuwertsz asserts, is to understand the truth, but a truth that is more evident in nature than in Scripture and which is known through reason. The Colleges afforded participants the opportunity to discuss their views and to share resources, and Jelles's *Belydenisse* undoubtedly took its initial shape across conversations with fellow Collegiants in Amsterdam. Indeed, when Jelles sent Spinoza a draft of his *Belydenisse*, Spinoza apparently responded "I have read over your writing with pleasure, and found it to be such that I can change nothing in it."[19] And while Spinoza does not necessarily endorse the *Belydenisse* to the letter it is reasonable to assume that he admired the scope of the project and was committed to working with its author in this Christian idiom. At the very least, we know that Jelles and Spinoza shared a Collegiant milieu from which the *Belydenisse* and the *TTP* both emerged.

Jelles subtly resituates Spinoza among his Collegiant friends and interlocutors when he affirms the relationship between Christianity and philosophy in the *Preface*, presenting the *Nagelate schriften* at large as a Collegiant work. Meijer, it should be said, sanctioned this particular effort when he translated Jelles's *Preface* into Latin. As Spinoza's close friend, Jelles was certainly well suited to testify to the philosopher's character as well as to his "erudition and great intellect."[20] But he was also uniquely able to address Spinoza's comportment to Christianity, even to accommodate Spinoza's work to a wider early modern audience. Jelles, in other words, relates the *TTP* and the contents of the *Nagelate schriften* directly to Collegiant thought and practices with the hope of making a broad case for its correspondence with Christianity. As such, from a modern perspective, the *Preface* seems to be an idiosyncratic introduction to Spinoza and his thought, emphasizing the philosopher's agreement with Christianity by showing how he discovers its rational foundations in the *Ethics*. Jelles's Spinoza, in turn, may strike many modern readers as unfamiliar. For instance, Jelles eschews any references to the author's Judaism or to the Jewish community in Amsterdam, opting instead to present Spinoza as a de facto Christian, but only insofar as Christianity is a rational religion that is irreducible to Scripture or any extant church or sect. Moreover, while the *Preface* is riddled with references to Scripture, in the margins as well as in the text itself, such references only ever confirm what is evident in nature and commended by reason. Scripture, in other words, is not a source; it is a derivative body of work that seals or corroborates what Spinoza demonstrates in the *Ethics* as evident in nature. Jelles's account of Christianity is distinct from Catholicism and Calvinism, and even from Remontrantism and the inflected Puritanism of the Further Reformation, the practical mysticism of Willem Teellinck, Gisbertus Voetius, and Johannes Hoornbeeck; there is no theology of the Cross in Jelles's *Preface*, no account of Christ's passion, death, or resurrection,

[19] Jelles, *Belydenisse*, 232–3; Ep 48B (C II 403).

[20] "Preface," 216–17.

no *imitatio Christi*, no sacraments or private spirituality.[21] Save for signal references to Desiderius Erasmus' *Annotations on the New Testament*, Jelles does not cite any theologians or philologists, not even signal figures like Sebastian Castellio, Jacobus Acontius, Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert, or Hugo Grotius who were important references in contemporary (in some cases, competing) approaches to minimal Christianity and universal faith.[22] Avoiding potentially divisive authorities, Jelles emphasizes instead how Spinoza's philosophy relates to Scripture and to Christianity in broad ecumenical terms. To this end Jelles delivers a thorough account of Spinoza's thought in the Preface. And, to reiterate the point to which I attend for the remainder of the essay: Jelles insists that Spinoza acknowledges a rational religion across his corpus of writing, a rational religion that corresponds to true Christianity. According to Jelles, Spinoza illustrates, in the *Ethics* as well as in the *TTP*, the very sense in which Paul called Christianity a "rational" [*redelijke*] religion in Romans 12:1: "because reason prescribes it and it is founded on reason."[23]

3. Rationality, Religion, and the *TTP*

With this in mind, Jelles admits what many modern readers are undoubtedly thinking: the idea that Spinoza acknowledges a rational religion—or, specifically, the suggestion that he recognized Christianity as a rational religion—seems directly opposed to Spinoza's project in the *TTP*. There, Jelles concedes, Spinoza seems to argue that since "religion consists in obedience alone," it is inappropriate to investigate the "the truth of what Scripture teaches" or to study Scripture "in order to acquire pure intellectual and adequate perceptions of such things."[24] The prophets in Scripture employed powers of imagination to interpret signs and

[21] While Leszek Kolakowski calls Jelles a "pseudo-rationalist mystic" [*La mystique…pseudo-rationaliste*] because his *Belydenisse* "*abonde en traces de spinozisme, mais d'un spinozisme assimilé, quant à sa teneur, à une mystique intellectuellement non élaborée*", it seems more accurate to call Jelles's an alternative to the varieties of mysticism in Amsterdam during the 1660s, 1670s, and 1680s. See Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans Église*, 217, 223. Francesco Quatrini's treatment of Adam Boreel and "rational mysticism" is instructive here. See Quatrini, *Adam Boreel*, 348–78.

[22] In ch. 9 of his *Spinoza and the Freedom of Philosophizing* Mogens Lærke delivers a sharp account of Spinoza's own approach to "doctrines of universal faith," as well as its similarities with important precursors, influences, and contemporaries—Edward Herbert of Cherbury and Isaac d'Huisseau, among others. In this chapter Lærke also affords us terms that enable us to compare, with acute attention, Spinoza's own philosophy with the interpretation of his work presented in Jelles's Preface. Of particular import is the distinction that he identifies, in Spinoza's writing, between "theoretical propositions that one can affirm as true or not true" and "'precepts' (*praecepta*) that one can conform to or not in one's actions," between "doctrines of universal faith" and "true religion." It seems to me that, across the Preface, Jelles ultimately shares Spinoza's conviction that (as Lærke says) "the truth of religion is a matter of practice," and that "true religion forms the practical *standard* of universal faith." See Lærke, *Freedom of Philosophizing*, 177–9.

[23] "Preface," 226–7.

[24] "Preface," 246–7.

communicate their meanings to audiences which were averse to philosophy. While the philosopher apprehends God and nature by means of reason, Scripture and its interpreters establish laws that warrant only obedience, not understanding. The autonomous freedom to philosophize thus poses no threat to either theology or law. Indeed, Jelles paraphrases Spinoza's thesis in the Preface to the *TTP*, "that God only demands obedience in Scripture, etc., and that Philosophy and Theology have nothing in common with each other but they both stand on their own legs."[25] Nevertheless, Jelles insists, this does not preclude the existence of a rational religion. On the contrary, careful readers will not only consider "the reasons that moved this man to argue to this end," those who have studied the work carefully will readily admit that Spinoza acknowledges a rational religion—one that is consonant with, if not the true version of, Christianity.[26]

First: Jelles makes a vague reference to "the reasons that moved this man to argue to this end." Canny readers, he suggests, will recognize why Spinoza took such caution to distinguish between philosophy and theology, between reason and faith, in the *TTP*. He implies that Spinoza's approach is tactical. Under other circumstances, Spinoza might have written a work demonstrating how philosophy is integral to theology and scriptural exegesis, a work much closer to Meijer's *Philosophia s. Scripturae interpres* (tellingly, Meijer himself reiterates Jelles's claim in his translation of the Preface). But Spinoza's book appeared in print soon after his interlocutor Adriaan Koerbagh, found guilty of violating anti-Socinian laws in Holland, died in prison. After the 1668 publication of both *A Garden of All Kinds of Loveliness without Sorrow* [*Een bloemhof van allerley lieflijkheyd sonder verdriet*] and *A Light Shining in Dark Places, to Illuminate the Main Questions of Theology and Religion* [*Een ligt schynende in duystere plaatsen: om te verligten de voornaamste saaken der gods geleertheyd en gods dienst*], Adriaan and his brother Johannes were arrested and interrogated by the magistrates and the consistory in Amsterdam.[27] Both were charged with propagating dangerous and heretical ideas. In *A Light Shining in Dark Places*, for instance, Adriaan Koerbagh employs reason to show that "true philosophy" alone renders Scripture appropriately intelligible, that "'Heaven' means being united with God through knowledge," "hell" is not a place but merely a synonym for "remorse," and "The Trinity is the product of a foolish metaphysics."[28] Associated with Socinianism, the publication and distribution of such ideas—particularly anti-Trinitarianism—were expressly forbidden in Holland after 1653.[29] And Adriaan Koerbagh repeatedly affirmed that he came to these conclusions by way of philosophy. He claims in no uncertain terms that "true religion is, and can only be, of one kind and must stem from reason";

[25] "Preface," 248–9; and C II 72–3.
[26] "Preface," 246–7.
[27] Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 194–5; Salatowsky, "Socinian Headaches," 165–203; van Bunge, "Introduction," 30–5.
[28] Koerbagh, *A Light Shining*, 60–1, 148–9, 340–53, 92–3.
[29] Kühler, *Het socinianisme*, 186–8; and Marshall, *John Locke*, 173–4.

philosophy discovers nothing less than "a rational, true, and clear religion free of concoctions or fictions, superstitions, cruelty and unreasonableness in which God…would be worshiped in a reasonable manner."[30] Koerbagh reiterates Meijer's approach to Scripture and theology, particularly where Meijer defines "true philosophy" in his *Philosophia s. Scripturae interpres* as the:

> true and indubitably certain knowledge which Reason, free from any veiling prejudice and sustained by the natural light and acuity of the intellect, cultivates and fostered by study, diligence, practice, experience and usage, draws forth and arranges under the most certain light of truth. It starts from principles that are immovable and known through themselves, and proceeds through legitimate inferences and logical demonstrations which are clearly and distinctly perceived.[31]

If the controversy surrounding the anonymous publication of Meijer's *Philosophia s. Scripturae interpres* in 1666 made Spinoza wary, Adriaan Koerbagh's death in the *rasphuis* gave him more urgent cause for caution. The authorities in Holland set an enduring example in their treatment of the Koerbaghs, one that was certainly not lost on Spinoza or Jelles. Indeed, in a 1671 letter to Jelles, Spinoza charged Jelles in particular with preventing the publication of a Dutch translation of the *TTP*, an edition which would have garnered unwanted attention from relevant authorities.[32] But even in the *TTP* itself, Spinoza takes great care to distinguish faith from philosophy. He maintains throughout that "there are no dealings, or no relationship, between faith, *or* Theology, and Philosophy," and that "no one is faithful except by reason of obedience" [*TTP* 14 (G III 179/C II 270–1)]. In the interest of caution, Spinoza foregrounds the distinction between philosophy and theology, relegating authority over Scripture to the prophets and theologians.

But Jelles also claims that this strategic distinction between philosophy and theology does not preclude Spinoza from recognizing a rational religion that is consonant with Christianity. In this sense, Jelles urges readers to pay close attention to how Spinoza defines key terms that masquerade as familiar or self-evident. It is crucial, for instance, that Jelles grounds his definition of a rational religion—"*een redelijke Godsdienst*," which Meijer renders as "*religio rationalis*"—directly in the *Ethics*.[33] Before he turns to Paul or the Gospels he cites E4p37s1, ascertaining that "whatever we desire and do of which we are the cause insofar as we have the idea of God, or insofar as we know God, he relates to religion; the desire to do good generated from this by our living according to the guidance of reason, he

[30] Koerbagh, *A Light Shining*, 218–19.
[31] Meijer, *Philosophy*, 105; Meijer, *Philosophia*, 40. See also Meijer, *De philosophie*, 48.
[32] See Ep 44, Spinoza to Jelles, February 16, 1671 (G IV 227a/C II 390).
[33] "Preface," 226–7.

calls morality" [G II 236/C I 565].[34] "Religion" [*Godsdienst*], to the letter, is nothing other than the desires, affects, and actions that relate to the adequate knowledge of God. Morality, in turn, is the deliberate action that proceeds from pure intellectual knowledge of God, apprehended through reason. Lest the reader look to Scripture for this knowledge of God, Jelles rehearses what it is that Spinoza means by "God," reproducing the philosopher's own succinct account of "God's nature and properties" as it appears in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*.[35]

Spinoza makes a similar case in the *TTP*, asserting that "Scripture is properly called the word of God only in relation to religion, *or* in relation to the universal divine law" [*TTP* 12 (G III 164/C II 254)]—that is, Scripture communicates the Word of God only insofar as it conforms to the expression of divine law in nature, *only when it relates the truth*. But Jelles also insists that Spinoza does not simply conflate God with nature.[36] Quoting Letter 73 at length, he emphasizes how Spinoza affirms his agreement "with Paul, and perhaps also with all the ancient Philosophers, though in another way," as well as with "the ancient Hebrews," when he notes that "all things are in God and move in God."[37] Granted, when Spinoza makes this point in Letter 73, he stipulates that his is "an opinion concerning God and Nature far different from the one Modern Christians usually defend" [Ep 73, Spinoza to Oldenburg, December 1, 1675 (G IV 307a/C II 467)].[38] But by distinguishing his own approach from that of the "Modern Christians"—the "*hedendaagsche Christenen*," or "*Christiani neoterici*" (as it appears in a Latin annotation in the margin in the *Nagelate schriften*)—Spinoza subtly announces

[34] "Preface," 224–5; *NS*, 218.

[35] Jelles presents Spinoza's paragraph as a series of enumerated points and makes a single change, altering Spinoza's "he exists and acts from the necessity *alone* of his nature" to "he exists and acts from the necessity of his nature" [*hy uit de nootzakelijkheit van zijn natuur is, en werkt*]. See "Preface," 218–21; G II 77/C I 439; *NS*, 38.

[36] In Letter 73—that is, his December 1675 response to Henry Oldenburg—Spinoza notes that "God is, as they say, the immanent, but not the transitive, cause of all things," emphasizing that God and nature are not simply identical but rather inextricably related in causal terms [Ep 73, Spinoza to Oldenburg, December 1, 1675 (G IV 307a/C II 467)]. Of course, Spinoza says the same thing in Part I of the *Ethics*, asserting there that "God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things" (E1p18), undermining substantive distinctions between God and particular things: "Everything that is, is in God, and must be conceived through God (by P15), and so (by P16C1) God is the cause of all things, which are in him." But Jelles turns to Letter 73, not to the *Ethics*, because in his response to Oldenburg Spinoza speaks to a more specific end—in this case, he explicitly opposes the "assumption that God is one and the same as Nature (by which [critical readers of the *TTP*] understand a certain mass, *or* corporeal matter)." With respect to those who misinterpret "nature" as "a certain mass, *or* corporeal matter"—that is to say, with respect to those who charge Spinoza with a species of pantheism—he responds that while "corporeal matter" is indeed in God, God is nevertheless irreducible to "corporeal matter." Hence they are not, strictly speaking, identical. God is the immanent cause of all things insofar as all things are in God, but "corporeal matter" does not encompass "all things." Spinoza recognizes God as the necessary cause of all things while acknowledging that particular elements of nature, particular existing things, are not identical to God; they are, rather, God's effects. This is of course evident in the *Ethics* as Spinoza introduces distinctions between attributes and modes and between *Natura naturata* and *Natura naturans*. "Preface," 220–1; *NS*, 23, 505. See Mason, *God of Spinoza*, 28–32; Nadler, *Spinoza's* Ethics, 81–3.

[37] "Preface," 220–1.

[38] *NS*, 505.

his agreement with the broad pedagogical mission of the primitive apostolic church. The "Modern" Christians, in turn, appear as innovators and schismatics, excessively cavillous, neglecting (knowingly or unknowingly) the affects and practices, the charity and friendship, of the primitive church—the sense in which the Apostles were teachers who communicated truth in many ways to diverse audiences, allowing for debate and interpretation, suited in each case to the mentality of the interpreters.[39] To make this continuity between Paul and Spinoza more clear, Jelles even omits Spinoza's pointed (but potentially divisive or alienating) reference to these "Modern Christians" in his Preface, opting instead to attribute the "difficulties brought forth against his *Theological-Political Treatise*" to "some men" or "whomever" [*enigen*].[40] And he seems to assume that the agreement between Spinoza's "all things are in God and move in God" and Paul's way of speaking is clear to those who are familiar with Scripture.[41] Indeed, Jelles emphasizes how Spinoza, like so many potential readers, is familiar with Scripture but without taking recourse to any presiding ecclesiastical, scholarly, or social authority. In short, Jelles presents Spinoza's approach to God as consonant with Apostolic Christianity in the Epistles, as if Spinoza merely confirms Paul's own propositions concerning God's properties, as if it is the "Modern Christians" and not Spinoza who deviate from true Christianity.[42] Spinoza's idea of God, Jelles contends, corresponds with abiding Christian notions of deity and its properties.

4. The Consistency between the *Ethics* and Scripture

After establishing what Spinoza means by God, arguing that he neither advocates pantheism nor subjects God to fate, Jelles proceeds to his more pressing concern: demonstrating that the "rule and measure of living" in the *Ethics* coincides

[39] Lærke outlines how Spinoza uses Paul's terms from 1 Corinthians 14:6. Collegiant habits of debate, exposition, and persuasion often hinge on interpretations of this passage as well as other passages across 1 Corinthians 14. Lærke, *Freedom of Philosophizing*, 57–9.

[40] "Preface," 220–1.

[41] The claim that "all things are in God and move in God" follows either Romans 11:36 or Acts 17:28, if not both: Paul affirms (respectively) "For of him, and through him, and to him are all things" and "For in him we live, and move, and have our being." Both of these *loci* are integral to Jelles's own *Belydenisse*, in his demonstration concerning "God and his properties." Jelles, *Belydenisse*, 12–13, 22–3.

[42] To illustrate how Spinoza does not subject God to either fate or necessity Jelles punctuates several key references to the *Ethics* and Letter 75 with a section of a vernacular poem by the celebrated poet P. C. Hooft—namely, Hooft's meditation on a line from Virgil's *Georgics*: "*Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*" (II.490) or (in the modern Loeb translation) "Blessed is he who has succeeded in learning the laws of nature's working." If Spinoza's treatment of "fatal necessity" [*nootschikkelijke nootzakelijkheit*] proved prohibitively difficult or unfamiliar to contemporary readers, Hooft's poem affords Jelles latitude among diverse Christian audiences in the Dutch Republic, particularly those who readily affirmed that "everything has been determined and preordained by his eternal decree" [*alles door een eeuwig besluit van God bepaalt en gevoorschikt*]. Virgil, *Georgics*, 170–1; Hooft, *Werken*, 244 [hh2^{v}]; and "Preface," 222–3.

directly with what Christ or the Apostles teach in the New Testament.[43] So too do they agree "with respect to the supreme good of man." To this end Jelles delivers a careful reading of the *Ethics*, establishing that what reason prescribes with regard to ethics is entirely in agreement with Christ and the Apostles' teachings. First, Jelles stipulates precisely what Spinoza means by "evil" [*quaat*] and "virtue" [*deucht*]. Citing E4p26 and E4p27 he underlines that "the Mind, insofar as it uses reason, only judges that which leads to understanding as useful to itself; and evil, that which can prevent us from understanding"; drawing from E4p23 and E4p24, moreover, Jelles exhibits that since "Virtue is to conceive a thing intellectually and adequately," to act "from adequate ideas is nothing but acting absolutely from virtue."[44] Strictly speaking, Jelles does not misquote or misinterpret the *Ethics* here. But he tellingly defines "virtue" [*deucht*] only with respect to understanding, eschewing the foundational propositions E4def8 and E4p20 in which Spinoza introduces "virtue" in terms of power: "By virtue and power I understand the same thing" and "Virtue is human power itself, which is defined…solely by the striving by which man strives to persevere in his being. So the more each one strives, and is able, to preserve his being, the more he is endowed with virtue."[45] So too does he collate "evil" with misunderstanding—again, not necessarily a misreading of the *Ethics* but nonetheless avoiding propositions like E4p8d: "We call good, or evil, what is useful to, or harmful to, preserving our being."[46] To the letter, Jelles contrasts things "useful" to understanding with things "evil" insofar as they prevent us from understanding. He foregrounds the distinction between utility and evil, not good and evil, only invoking the "good" apropos of E4p28 which he paraphrases thus: "because the greatest thing the Mind can perceive is God, knowledge of God is the mind's greatest good, and to know God is its greatest virtue." And from this point Jelles moves directly to E4p37s1, noting that "whatever we desire and do of which we are the cause insofar as we have the idea of God, or insofar as we know God, he relates to Religion; the Desire to do good generated from this by our living according to the guidance of reason, he calls Morality" (G II 236/C I 565).[47] His reconstruction of the *Ethics* here is selective, perhaps misleading, collating the knowledge of God directly with religion and morality without demonstrating precisely how Spinoza redefines key terms like "good" and "evil" with respect to reason and *conatus*. Nevertheless, Jelles echoes Spinoza's own account of the divine law in the *TTP*, where the philosopher summarizes how a "universal Ethics" would show that "the love of God is man's highest happiness and blessedness, and the ultimate end and object of all human actions," and that the religious person "knows that the knowledge and love of God is the highest good" [*TTP* 4 (G III 60/C II 128)].

[43] "Preface," 224–5. [44] "Preface," 224–5. [45] "Preface," 224–5; *NS*, 189, 204.
[46] "Preface," 224–5; *NS*, 195. [47] "Preface," 224–5; *NS*, 218.

Jelles's aim, after all, is to show that Christ and the Apostles teach exactly "what reason prescribes."[48] Reason "prescribes" [*voorschrijft*]; Christ and the Apostles do not reveal or command, they "teach" [*leren en onderwijzen*]. Reason dictates that those who truly understand God necessarily demonstrate friendship and honor (E4p37s1) as well as steadfast honesty (E4p72); they eschew anger, hatred, envy, and pride, and realize "Strength of Character" (E4p73s1); they are "thankful to one another" (E4p71).[49] Men who live according to reason are bound to agree in nature and to desire the best for each other (E4p35, E4p37). Moreover, they are compelled by reason to repay even hate with love (E4p46). Jelles does not emphasize how such reasonable behaviors are at once expressions of self-preservation. He does not underline the importance of E4p37s2 wherein we learn that "there is nothing in the state of nature which, by the agreement of all, is good or evil; for everyone who is in the state of nature considers only his own advantage, and decides what is good and what is evil from his own temperament, and only insofar as he takes account of his own advantage" (G II 238/C I 567).[50] Instead Jelles immediately posits that, insofar as reason dictates that knowing God is our greatest virtue, so too does this knowledge of God afford mankind true freedom and true joy. Citing E4p52, E4p52s1, E5p27, E5p32c, E5p33, and E5p36s he claims that an intellectual knowledge of God enables us to overcome evil affects, thus affording us "the greatest satisfaction of Mind there can be, as well as the eternal love of God," nothing less than "our highest salvation, or blessedness, or freedom."[51]

Thus it is by way of the *Ethics* that Jelles arrives at the conclusion "that God must be loved above all, and our neighbors as ourselves"—that is, because we acquire the eternal love of God through intellectual knowledge and those who have acquired intellectual knowledge of God strive for friendship and love for others. Only then does Jelles invoke Christ and the Apostles, to underline that their teachings conform with reason. Indeed, "the moral doctrines of the Christian Religion are completely contained" in this short statement about love for God and one's neighbors; it expresses in brief everything that is necessary to know for salvation.[52] And as the "moral doctrines" of Christianity are rational so too does Jelles explicitly identify Christianity as a "rational religion."[53] To the letter, Jelles makes no effort to demonstrate that knowledge of Scripture is necessary for salvation. In fact, Jelles echoes Meijer's language in the *Philosophia s. Scripturae interpres* and establishes reason as "the true and infallible standard and touchstone of truth and falsehood."[54] With this in mind he determines that Christ's teachings, evident as they are in Scripture, are rational insofar as they can be summarized thus: "God must be loved above all, and our neighbors as ourselves."

[48] "Preface," 226–7. [49] "Preface," 224–7; *NS* 249–50. [50] *NS*, 220.
[51] "Preface," 226–7; *NS*, 232, 287, 290, 291, 293. [52] "Preface," 226–7.
[53] "Preface," 226–7.
[54] "Preface," 242–3; See also Meijer, *Philosophy*, 220; and Meijer, *De philosophie*, 122–3.

These teachings, in turn, are the basis for a Christian ethics that is virtually indistinguishable from an ethics grounded in reason. Spinoza, it should be said, suggests as much in the *TTP* when he claims that "that we have received the divine law without its being corrupted" in Scripture when we comprehend "its most important themes without any difficulty or ambiguity: to love God above all else, and to love your neighbor as yourself" [*TTP* 12 (G III 165/C II 255)]. Spinoza and Jelles alike imply that this expression of "rational" religion appears in Scripture *despite* the limits of Scripture, and that Scripture is truly the Word of God insofar as it confirms this principle of religion. Indeed, Jelles explicitly argues that the works of "the law and the prophets" refer to many things that are not themselves revealed in Scripture, which are the province of reason alone. Moreover, among these things that "properly cannot be understood other than spiritually or purely intellectually," Jelles even includes an important aspect of the Trinity—that is, the relationship between God and "the Son of God, namely God's reason or God's wisdom" [*Gods Zoon, namelijk Gods reden, of Gods wijsheit*]—together with truth, justice, and "the essences of things in general."[55] With this in mind, Jelles avers, we may readily discern the sense [*opzicht*] in which Paul calls Christianity "a rational religion" in Romans 12:1, a conclusion that Erasmus confirms, apropos of Origen and Theophylact, in his *Annotations on the New Testament*.[56]

Jelles thus establishes Christianity as a rational religion insofar as it pertains to nature and the spirit, not to Scripture. Like Spinoza, who distinguishes prophecy from those matters "which concern loving-kindness and how to conduct our lives" and which belong to a universal ethics, Jelles wrests the core principles of Christianity from Scripture and prophecy; after all, even Spinoza claims that "we really should not seek knowledge of natural *or spiritual* things from Scripture" [*TTP* 2 (G III 42/C II 109); *TTP* 4 (G III 60/C II 128)].[57] So too does Spinoza write that the "most natural" religion that Christ and the Apostles preached "to everyone as a universal law" was "only new in relation to those who had not known it"—that is, the Jews [*TTP* 12 (G III 162/C II 253)]. Where Scripture confirms this natural, universal knowledge, Spinoza says, "those passages…treat true religion and true virtue," the subjects of reason, not prophecy [*TTP* 12 (G III 162/C II 253)]. Jelles expands these statements, addressing common aspects of Christianity which Spinoza does not address, defining rebirth or regeneration [*wedergeboorte*] in appropriately rational terms. Rebirth, he claims:

[55] "Preface," 236–7.

[56] "Preface," 226–7; Erasmus, *Romans*, 322–3.

[57] Spinoza, *Rechtzinnige theologant*, 43. I add several references to the 1693 translation of the *TTP—De rechtzinnige theologant*—so interested readers can compare Jelles's terms with those used by Spinoza's early translator. Notably, Spinoza himself opposed the Dutch translation of the *TTP* and wrote to Jelles for help, to prevent it from appearing in print. See C II 390.

> consists entirely in laying aside or overcoming evil affects and in killing the earthly and empty desires that are naturally found in us; and, on the other hand, in acquiring and obtaining good desires, or such desires that only pertain to what is good and true, as well as the love of God, peace or true satisfaction of mind, joy, truth, justice (which is a constant and eternal will to give each his own), benevolence, etc., all of which, as our writer demonstrates, are necessary fruits or works of the intellect.[58]

Jelles introduces rebirth by way of a marginal reference to John 3:3–5, emphasizing that rebirth is absolutely necessary for salvation. Once again, however, Jelles affords careful readers the resources to reconstruct Spinoza's argument so that this scriptural reference merely confirms what Part V of the *Ethics* makes clear on its own—namely, that love of God and salvation corresponds to our ability to overcome evil affects and achieve satisfaction of mind. This, Jelles claims, is what it means to "put off the old man" and "put on the new man" in Ephesians 4:22–4 and Colossians 3:9–10; this is what it means for the spirit to gain dominion over the flesh, in Romans 8:5–15 and Galatians 5:16–33. In short, Scripture frequently testifies that Christians must strive "to understand, according to one's powers, the truth of what it is necessary to know for salvation," a proposition which Jelles equates directly with the endeavor "to obtain pure intellectual perceptions and to behave according to them: that is, to live according to the dictate of reason."[59]

This is a rational endeavor that involves knowledge of Christ. But Jelles insists that Christ himself is nothing other than "God's Reason, or Intellect," as the Evangelist makes clear in John 1:1. Indeed, he claims to follow Erasmus "and many others who are skilled in languages" when he interprets the Greek "λόγος" as "internal reason" [*d'innerlijke reden*] or "the intellect" and not as "the word."[60] Jelles even offers a distinctive paraphrase of John 1:1–4 that confirms Spinoza's theses on God in the *Ethics*. Departing from the language of the Dutch *Statenvertaling*—that is, from the familiar "*In den beginne was het Woord, en het Woord was bij God, en het Woord was God*…"—Jelles writes:

> In the beginning this, namely reason, was with God and even was himself God, that is, it participated in the divine essence; nothing is made without it, in it was

[58] Although Jelles does not mention it in the Preface, Spinoza does discuss "rebirth" or "*wedergeboorte*" the *KV* 2.3 (G I 57–8/C I 100–2). "Preface," 226–9.

[59] "Preface," 228–9.

[60] This is not at all what Erasmus argues in his *Annotationes*. While he readily admits that "Logos means many different things for the Greeks" [*λόγος Graecis varia significat*], including "reason" [*rationem*], he offers the Latin "sermo" or "discourse" as the optimal translation. And while Jelles asserts without qualification that Erasmus translated *λόγος* as "Reden," even he recognizes that Erasmus did not mean "internal reason or the intellect" but rather "external reason, with which internal reason is explained to others," an explanation that captures the meaning of "sermo." See Erasmus, *Annotationes*, 208–9; and "Preface," 230–3.

> life, and this life was the intellectual light of men, etc. as we see in John 1:1–4. For who does not know that the internal reason of God or the intellect is not something different from God himself and for that reason was with God in the beginning, and was God himself, or participated in the divine essence? Who denies that without his work nothing is made, and, finally, that the human mind is illuminated with a wonderful light by the divine intellect?[61]

In this paraphrase of John, Jelles recruits Christ as a witness to philosophy, irreducible to the scriptural Jesus. Christ is reason; to be reborn is to live and act according to the dictate of reason; without Christ we are ignorant of truth and unable to know or do that which is required for salvation. To be specific, he identifies Christ as *internal* reason since intellectual knowledge of God does not depend upon authority, external testimony rendered in discourse, or special revelation. Departing sharply from Spinoza's use of the term "faith" across the *TTP*, Jelles defines "saving faith" [*zaligmakend geloof*] as the intellectual knowledge of God; Jelles effectively affirms that men are only Christian insofar as they participate in the rational pursuit of truth.[62]

Jelles's commitments are most evident in his oblique presentation of the Trinity in the Preface. While he does not present himself or Spinoza as Trinitarians Jelles nevertheless makes it clear that neither he nor the philosopher are, strictly speaking, anti-Trinitarian. Many of Jelles's contemporaries—most notably, Socinians—rejected the Trinity as a confused and confusing metaphysical doctrine lacking any scriptural foundations.[63] In the Latin Racovian Catechism, for instance, we learn that Trinitarians "lamentably err" when they misconstrue the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as three distinct personae in one deity, "deducing their arguments from passages of Scripture ill understood."[64] Put simply, because there is no solid scriptural basis for the Trinity, they deny its truth. Jelles takes a markedly different approach in the Preface as well as in his *Belydenisse*. To the letter, Jelles does not invoke the "*Heilige Drie-eenheid*" explicitly in the Preface. But he implies that the Trinity has pedagogical import, even as he subtly denies its basis in Scripture. The doctrine of the Trinity, in other words, only makes sense with respect to nature; its irrelevance in Scripture only proves that Scripture offers limited insight into God. Eschewing the metaphysical languages of substance and personae, he explains in detail how God, Jesus Christ the Son of God, and the Spirit are ostensibly three names for the intellect, although none of them is reducible to the intellect. In this sense they are three distinct names for God and its knowledge of itself. Referring directly to the *Ethics*, Jelles introduces God as that in which all things reside, upon which all things depend, and without which

[61] "Preface," 232–3.
[62] "Preface," 234–7.
[63] McLachlan, *Socinianism*, 5–13; Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 147–76.
[64] *Racovian Catechism*, 34.

nothing can be or be thought. In Scripture, moreover, Christ himself appears as "God's Reason, or Intellect"—in John 1:1–4, for instance, as well as in John 17:21–3, in which Christ testifies that he is one with the Father. Jelles even establishes "the Son of God" as another name for "God's reason or God's wisdom"—not only because "as anyone who knows God recognizes, nothing other than pure intellectual knowledge can have place in God" but also because "Christ understood the truth of the doctrine of salvation, which he preached."[65] Jelles's interpretation of Christ is not unrelated to Spinoza's own treatment of Christ in the *TTP*. Christ, Spinoza avers, understood God perfectly; to him "the decisions of God, which lead men to salvation, were revealed immediately" or, in Jelles's idiom, "internally"—that is, "without words and visions" [*TTP* 1 (G III 21/C II 84)]. Christ, Spinoza maintains, "perceived things truly and adequately," not as a prophet but as "the mouth of God" [*TTP* 4 (G III 64/C II 133)]. This is what Spinoza means when he writes that "God's wisdom, that is, a Wisdom surpassing human wisdom, assumed a human nature in Christ, and that Christ was the way to salvation" [*TTP* 1 (G III 21/C II 84)]. John 14:6 figures prominently in both Jelles's Preface and in Spinoza's treatment of Christ, where he distinguishes between Christ's teaching and prophecy [*TTP* 1 (G III 21/C II 84)].[66] Nevertheless, Spinoza exercises caution, neither affirming nor denying many "things some of the Churches maintain about Christ," things that he claims not to understand [*TTP* 1 (G III 21/C II 84)]. He thus fastidiously avoids invoking the Trinity in the *TTP*, nor does he wade into debates on Christ's identity with reason or *logos*, matters to which Jelles attends in the Preface.

Of course, any treatment of the Trinity must account for the Holy Spirit as well as Father and Son. To this end Jelles sharpens Spinoza's oblique statements about the Holy Spirit in the *TTP*. In his chapter on faith, Spinoza notes how John collates love and "the Spirit of God" in 1 John 4:13, claiming "that no one is aware of God, or acknowledges God, except by loving-kindness towards his neighbor, and that in fact no one can come to know any other attribute of God beyond this Loving-kindness, insofar as we participate in it" [*TTP* 14 (G III 176/C II 266–7)]. Spinoza does not readily endorse the scriptural statement, conceding that John writes "according to his principles, accepted at that time," with an eye to obedience rather than understanding. In the next chapter, moreover, Spinoza establishes that the "only Spirit which gives testimony concerning truth and certainty in speculative matters is reason" and that "anyone [who] says he has a Spirit other than [reason] which makes him certain of the truth, he's making a false boast" [*TTP* 15 (G III 188/C II 281)]. He claims, in turn, that "the Holy Spirit is nothing but a satisfaction which arises in the mind from good actions" [*TTP* 15 (G III 188/C II 281)]. But where Spinoza only relates "Justice" and "Loving-kindness"—"*de geregtigheit*" and "*de liefde*," in Glazemaker's translation—to faith in the *TTP*, Jelles makes it clear

[65] "Preface," 236–7. [66] "Preface," 230–3.

that in the *Ethics* both justice and love (particularly the love of God) are the province of rational religion, crucial to a universal ethics grounded in reason alone [*TTP* 14 (G III 176–7/C II 266–7)].[67] And so the "satisfaction which arises in the mind from good actions" of which Spinoza speaks is not particular to faith or Scripture but rather an apt description of the intellectual love of God. Jelles seems to think Spinoza invites careful readers to identify the Holy Spirit with reason insofar as it pertains to all of those who are satisfied by their demonstration of love toward God and neighbor, whether they are motivated by reason itself or by the accommodated expression of reason in Scripture. If Spinoza is careful in his treatment of the Holy Spirit, Jelles is more explicit, identifying "the spirit" as nothing other than "reason," which both Romans 8 and Galatians 5 confirm; to be led by the spirit is to follow the intellect; it is in this sense that "spiritual" knowledge is at once "pure intellectual" knowledge—an equation that Spinoza himself suggests elsewhere in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*.[68] In his *Belydenisse*, Jelles is even careful to draw a distinction between "the historical narrative of Holy Scripture" [*het Historiaal der Heilige Schrift*] and "that which the Holy Spirit teaches in Holy Scripture" [*het geen dat de Heilige Geest in de H. Schrift leert*], refusing to attribute Scripture at large to the Holy Spirit—that is, to reason.[69]

Consequently, the transitive identity between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rests entirely on each of their identity with reason or the intellect. And it is in and through God/Christ/the Holy Spirit/Reason that humanity comes to know God. This knowledge of God, in turn, is "the Mind's greatest good" (E4p28), and our freedom and salvation depend on our ability to acquire "a pure intellectual and adequate knowledge…of God and of things."[70] In this sense Jelles suggests that humanity finds salvation in Christ, in the Son that is one with the Father, in God's spiritual/intellectual knowledge of itself. And thus humanity may achieve unity with and as God through intellectual knowledge of something that is necessary for salvation, the object of the *Ethics*.[71] So too is the unity in faith—that is, the sense in which a "constant" [*vastigheit*] saving faith renders us "one among ourselves or with Christ, as he is one with the Father," as Scripture testifies in John 17:21–3, Galatians 3:28, and Ephesians 4:14—contingent upon acquiring the spiritual knowledge of God that is nothing other than intellectual knowledge.[72] The full extent of the Trinity, Jelles confirms, is "revealed without law or Scripture."[73] His is undoubtedly an idiosyncratic treatment of the Trinity, markedly different than orthodox (Reformed, Lutheran, or Catholic) interpretations. Nevertheless, by collating the *Ethics* and the *TTP*, Jelles argues that neither he nor Spinoza are, strictly speaking, *anti*-Trinitarians.

[67] Spinoza, *Rechtzinnige Theologant*, 247.
[68] "Preface," 228–31, 236–7; see *TTP* 2 (G III 42/C II 109).
[69] Jelles, *Belydenisse*, 142–3.
[70] "Preface," 26–7.
[71] "Preface," 234–5.
[72] "Preface," 234–5.
[73] "Preface," 236–7.

Strikingly, Jelles embraces the extent to which the Trinity is extra-scriptural. He agrees with the anti-Trinitarians insofar as one may not deduce the existence of the Trinity through scriptural exegesis. The Trinity is not adequately understood from prophecy or authority or what generally passes for revelation. The doctrine is only meaningful and consistent with respect to nature, insofar as God, God's Son, and the Holy Spirit are expressions of the intellect and intellection. To understand the Trinity, and to achieve unity in faith, one must recognize the province of reason. Indeed, in the *Belydenisse* Jelles invokes "the most outstanding poet of this age Joost van den Vondel" to support this argument; a celebrated Golden Age writer in vogue among rationalists and spiritualists, Mennonites, Remonstrants, and Catholics alike, Vondel explained "the eternal generation of God's Son and the Holy Spirit as well as their unity of being with God the Father" in his influential *Reflections on God and Religion* [*Bespiegelingen van God en Godsdienst*], discovering both the Son and the Holy Spirit as expressions of God's reason and self-knowledge.[74] In this sense Jelles claims that "the *Holy Trinity* of the *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Spirit*, which seems very obscure—indeed, incomprehensible—to many Christians, can easily be understood by anyone."[75]

5. Christianity, Judaism, and the Relation between the *Ethics* and the *TTP*

The ability to acquire "adequate" [*evenmatige*] or "pure intellectual" [*zuiver verstandelijke*] perceptions, moreover, is what distinguishes Christianity from Judaism. Remember: Judaism occupies a liminal place in Jelles's Preface. There are no references to Spinoza's own Judaism or to Judaism in general, beyond its allegorical meaning in Scripture. Instead, Israel, Jews, and Judaism connote ignorance or unfreedom. Mobilizing the language of the Epistles, Jelles presents the Jews as people who only know God by way of the Law or Scripture, not by way of reason. Christians, in contrast, are led by the Spirit—that is to say, by the "intellect," "the light of knowledge," or, by way of John 1:17, "the light of grace and truth"—and *not* "by law or precept, like the Jews."[76] That is not to say that reason frees men from any obligation to follow the Law. On the contrary, many are required to do precisely what the Law commands. Jelles, however, underlines how "justification…cannot be obtained through either the law or the works of the law," a Pauline injunction that takes on new meaning in the Preface, where "justification" and "saving faith" are achieved through the "spiritual understanding" of

[74] Jelles, *Belydenisse*, 48–9, 234–5; Vondel, "Dryeenigheit," 748; and Vondel, *Bespiegelingen*, 196. See also Vondel, *Onderwys*, 12.
[75] Jelles, *Belydenisse*, 48–9.
[76] "Preface," 230–1.

God—that is, by "obtaining true and pure intellectual perception."[77] Thus Jelles draws a distinction between those who are led by the intellect to obey a law and those who "are moved and driven to obey" by "coercion" [*dwang*] rather than reason.[78] Laws are obligatory for diverse reasons. But while "those on whom the light of grace and truth shine" obey deliberately "out of knowledge," many others follow the law unthinkingly, with no critical sense of its limits or their motivations.[79] It is in this sense that the Jews "*live* according to the Law" [*naar wet te leven*], as it gives meaning to their lives, as if it demands more than obeisance.[80] In this sense the Jelles uses "Israel" to refer to all of those who know God only through Scripture. "Israel" is by no means limited to the Jews of the Old Testament. In fact, Jelles follows Paul, invoking Israel and Judaism to refer to a more enduring distinction in 1 Corinthians 2:14–15 between "natural man" and "spiritual man":

> The natural man (that is, the man who is taught only by the letter or Scripture and not by the Spirit or the intellect) does not perceive spiritual things, all of which are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them—that is, he cannot understand them with the kind of knowledge that originates in the imagination (1 Corinthians 2:14); and this is the reason, on the other hand, that the spiritual man (who, it is clear, has acquired spiritual or purely intellectual perceptions of God, the son of God, etc.) may judge by discerning or distinguishing all things, and can be judged in this way by no natural man. (1 Corinthians 2:15)[81]

Spinoza invokes "the man of the flesh" in the *TTP*, the man who demonstrates neither knowledge nor love of God and who, lacking insight into "universal human nature," believes only in partial historical narratives [*TTP* 4 (G III 61/C II 129)]. Jelles, moreover, refers directly to *Ethics* to understand this distinction. He compares Paul's account of "the flesh" and "carnal men"—which one must understand, respectively, as the "animal desires" and "such men who are subject to these desires or who do not yet have the power to control the affects"—directly with Parts IV and V of the *Ethics* where Spinoza explores "*the powers of the affects* and *man's lack of power* to moderate and restrain them."[82] In his Preface, however, Jelles ascribes this "*onmacht*" or powerlessness first to Israel and only by extension to "natural man" or "carnal man."[83] While Spinoza calls such men "faithful" (and their narratives, "prophecy"), Jelles calls them "Jews."

Jelles understands the desire for miracles, in turn, as a symptom of the inability to understand "things of the Spirit" that he attributes to the Jews or, broadly, to an "Israel" that includes any people who lack intellectual knowledge of (and love for) God. Taking 1 Corinthians 1:22 as a point of departure, Jelles asserts that the Jews

[77] "Preface," 236–7, 244–5. [78] "Preface," 232–3, 236–7. [79] "Preface," 232–3.
[80] "Preface," 236–7 (my emphasis). [81] "Preface," 238–9. [82] "Preface," 240–1.
[83] "Preface," 238–41.

"desire miracles," defining "Jews" as those "who are under the Law and who by no means understand the truth of the thing."[84] On the one hand, Spinoza describes such men as "subject to superstition and contrary to religion" [*superstitioni obnoxii, & religioni adversi*] [*TTP* Preface (G III 5/C II 66)]. Jelles suggests that we should read "*religio*" as *rational* religion. But Spinoza also emphasizes the degree to which miracles appeal to "faith" in the *TTP*, and how miracles and other wonders "seem deliberately designed to put out the light of the intellect entirely" [*TTP* Preface (G III 8/C II 66)]. Jelles, once again, understands "faith" in a markedly different way than Spinoza. According to Jelles, the Jews demand miracles because they *lack* faith—that is, they lack the absolute certainty that comes with reason, a certainty that be acquired only through the intellectual knowledge of God. Christians, Jelles claims, require no miracles. In marginal references to the Gospels Jelles illustrates that the Pharisees and Sadducees alone demand miracles from Christ, as if the divinity and authority of his words were otherwise uncertain.

Jelles also seizes on this distinction between spiritual man and carnal man, between pure intellectual knowledge and "the kind of knowledge that originates in the imagination," between Christian and Jew, to explain precisely how the *Ethics* relates to the *TTP*.[85] He asserts that "we are initially placed in such a condition that by necessity we are led only by obedience and not by knowledge" and suggests that, like the scriptural Jews, many "remain in such a state for their entire lives."[86] The *Ethics* will not appeal to them. Such carnal men only encounter the Word of God imperfectly, by way of Scripture or another partial historical account, but they are nonetheless able to apprehend the principles of rational religion insofar as "God in Scripture requires no knowledge of himself other than that he is most just and most merciful, that he is the only exemplar of a true life, and that we should serve him only through obedience and the practice of love and justice."[87] This is the lesson of the *TTP*. Indeed, no greater an authority than Paul "clearly reveals that not all men are capable [*niet even bequaam zijn*] of being led by knowledge, and that most men, if they are compared with the entire human species, must be led through obedience."[88] It is "characteristic" or "fitting" [*eigen*] that Jews and children in Christ are led by the law or scripture; indeed "all men—young and old, learned and unlearned, those of great and slight intellect—are equally capable of this."[89]

Jelles affirms that the principles of rational religion are no less rational when accommodated in Scripture. To make this case, he adjusts some of Spinoza's key claims in the *TTP*—the notion that "Revealed knowledge has nothing in common with natural knowledge," for instance, that "each is in charge of its own domain,

[84] "Preface," 240–1. [85] "Preface," 238–9. [86] "Preface," 246–7.
[87] "Preface," 246–7. [88] "Preface," 246–7. [89] "Preface," 246–9.

without any conflict with the other" [*TTP* Preface (G III 10–11/C II 73)]. Jelles suggests that Spinoza merely exercises caution here, and that he expresses his intent clearly when he illustrates the degree to which Scripture communicates natural (that is, spiritual) knowledge, the degree to which Scripture itself may accurately be called "the word of God"—namely, insofar as it expresses "the universal divine law" as well as universal ethical principles of "religion" and "loving-kindness" [*TTP* 12 (G III 164/C II 254), *TTP* 2 (G III 142/C II 109)]. Indeed, Jelles rejects the assumption that "revelation" is a synonym for Scripture at large, using the term to describe the expression of reason in nature as well as Scripture. Only in this sense is Spinoza's statement, that "Revealed knowledge has nothing in common with natural knowledge," true—that is, Scripture itself is as divided as it is divisive, communicating both revealed knowledge and natural knowledge, historical knowledge and universal knowledge, and it is our task to distinguish the former from the latter. This is, in a sense, the project of the *Belydenisse*, although Jelles, lacking Spinoza's facility with Hebrew, is far less invested in philology. Neither is he particularly interested in the prophetic books. Save for many marginal references to the Psalms and Proverbs, the biblical citations in the Preface to the *Nagelate schriften* overwhelmingly hail from the New Testament which has a different status for Spinoza.[90] So Jelles avoids citing the prophets who figure so prominently in the *TTP*. Instead, he takes Spinoza's comments on Christ and the Apostles as points of departure, eschewing philology and the study of Scripture as a series of partial historical accounts, looking instead at the agreement between Christ's teaching and the "rational religion" of the *Ethics*.

6. Conclusion

I certainly do not mean to suggest that Jelles's interpretations of the *Ethics* or the *TTP* are authoritative, nor is it entirely clear how (if at all) Jelles's theses on rational religion impact more recent studies of Spinoza's comportment to Scripture and theology.[91] What is certain, however, is that Jelles was compelled to present Spinoza's *Ethics*—indeed, Spinoza's entire oeuvre—as an exposition of a rational religion. His account of rational religion, in turn, is the hinge on which his demonstration of the crucial agreement between Spinoza's thought and Christianity turns. Significantly, Jelles says little about power or political authority in the Preface, beyond a brief precis of the *Tractatus politicus*. He is either not interested in or too wary to address the direct political implications of Spinoza's

[90] The exceptions: Job 28:12–20; Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 1:4; Isaiah 33:6 and 53:11; and Jeremiah 31:33–4.

[91] See, for instance Preus, *Biblical Authority*; James, *Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*; and Matheron, *Le Christ*.

work in 1677, opting instead to focus on how Spinoza treats freedom, blessedness, and salvation in the *Ethics*. They are terms, Jelles suggests, that take on new meaning in Scripture, in light of Spinoza's philosophy. In his Preface, as he draws the *Ethics* together with the *TTP*, Jelles challenges Spinoza's earliest readers to discern which among the familiar elements of Christianity are actually necessary for salvation; he suggests, in turn, that these necessary aspects are evident in nature and thus available to the intellect without any recourse to Scripture or ecclesiastical authority. As he collates the *Ethics* and the *TTP* with select *loci* from Scripture, and as he argues that Christianity is a rational religion, Jelles does not in any way justify what passes for Christianity among his contemporaries (or ours): he winnows Christianity down to a rational core, and suggests that the minimal "moral doctrines" of the Christian Religion, however rational, are hardly exclusive to Christianity. For Jelles, it is *a* rational religion, not *the* rational religion. At the very least, Jelles reminds us that Collegiants ranked among Spinoza's interlocutors and suggests that his earliest readers identified Spinoza's as a critical contribution to an ongoing Dutch debate on the reasonableness of Christianity.

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14

Finding Oneself in God

Scientia Intuitiva as a Metaphysically Self-Locating Thought

Kristin Primus

"Cognition of the third kind," or *scientia intuitiva*, is a keystone of the *Ethics*. The greatest satisfaction of mind [*acquiescentia mentis, acquiescentia animi*] and an eternal "intellectual" love of God arise from this kind of cognition (E5p27, E5p33, E5p37). Indeed, our "salvation, or blessedness, or freedom" [*salus seu beatitudo seu libertas*] consists in this eternal love of God [E5p36s, cf. *TTP* 4 (G III 60/C II 128)].

Yet it is hard to discern what *scientia intuitiva* is.[1] Spinoza's description of it is obscure: it "proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate cognition of the [NS: formal] essence of things" (E2p40s2).[2] But what is a "formal essence"? Is *scientia intuitiva* knowledge of a thing's specific essence, or what exactly makes the thing the very singular thing it is?[3] Or is the emphasis supposed to be on the *formal* of "formal essence," where this is understood, along Cartesian lines, to be *formal reality*, the reality a thing has as *an existent thing*? (see *Third Meditation* [AT VII 41–2/CSMK II 28–9], and *First Replies* [AT VII 102–4/CSMK II 74–6)]). If so, perhaps *scientia intuitiva* is not intuitive knowledge of what makes a thing the very thing it is, but rather a veridical cognition of the formal reality that thing enjoys.[4]

Another complication is that *scientia intuitiva*, the "third kind of cognition," has much in common with reason, the "second kind of cognition" in which one "sees the force of," for example, Euclidean demonstrations.[5] Both reason and *scientia intuitiva* pertain to ideas that are adequate (E2p41d), necessarily true (E2p41), and teach us "to distinguish the true from the false" (E2p42).[6]

[1] For recent discussion, see A. Garrett, *Meaning*, ch. 7; D. Garrett, "Spinoza's Theory"; Primus, "*Scientia intuitiva*"; and Soyarslan, "The Distinction."

[2] "*Hoc cognoscendi genus procedit ab adaequata idea essentiae formalis quorundam Dei attributorum ad adaequatam cognitionem essentiae rerum.*"

[3] Many interpreters hold some version of this view. See note 58.

[4] See my "*Scientia intuitiva*."

[5] Reason is "universal cognition" (E5p36s): "…we perceive many things and form universal notions…from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things" (E2p40s2). For discussion of the different senses of "*ratio*" across Spinoza's works, see LeBuffe, *Reason*.

[6] As I understand it, an idea is adequate in a mind when it can be completely explained by other ideas within the same mind (see E2p11c, E2p29s, and E2p38d). One and the same thing can be conceived in two ways under the attribute of thought (E2p21). Conceived as a representation of

Both involve understanding things "under a species of eternity" and as necessary.[7] Furthermore, "the more the mind understands things by the second and third kinds of cognition, the less it is acted on by affects which are evil, and the less it fears death" (E5p38).

The example Spinoza offers to illustrate the difference between reason and *scientia intuitiva* is not as clarifying as Spinoza had hoped it would be. Spinoza points out that one can find a missing fourth proportional by reasoning through the demonstration of Book VII, proposition 19 of Euclid's *Elements*, but in the simplest cases, one need not follow any procedure:

> Given the numbers 1, 2, and 3, no one fails to see that the fourth proportional number is 6—and we see this much more clearly because we infer the fourth number from the ratio which, in one glance [*uno intuitu*], we see the first number to have to the second. [E2p40s2][8]

Even children can grasp the concepts *half* or *double*, or the ratio 1/2; *everyone* can see that 6 is the right answer. Yet this emphasis on effortlessness seems to conflict with Spinoza's later pronouncements on the difficulty (and rarity) of *scientia intuitiva* and *beatitudo* (E5p42s). The example also suggests that *scientia intuitiva* and reason are not distinguished by *what* is known, but rather *how* what is known is known. An emphasis on the sameness of known content, however, does not appear to accord with Spinoza's later statements that *scientia intuitiva* is a cognition of "singular things" while reason is "universal cognition" (E5p36s).

In this essay, I try to explain why *scientia intuitiva* is special, as well as clarify how reason can prepare a mind for this intuition. Elsewhere I have proposed that *scientia intuitiva* confers epistemic benefits much like Descartes's *scientia*.[9] Here I say more about the cognition itself.[10]

Some have argued that Spinoza's distinction between reason and *scientia intuitiva* is not unlike Descartes's distinction between deduction and intuition:

something else (i.e. in terms of its *objectum*), an idea *i* is caused or explained by the *objecta* of ideas *j*, *k*, *l* within the mind. Conceived as an instance of the activity of thinking, *i* is caused or explained by *j*, *k*, *l* also conceived as acts of thinking. For more discussion, see Primus, "Reflective Knowledge."

[7] For explicit claims that cognition of the second kind involves understanding things *sub specie aeternitatis* and as necessary, see E2p44, E2p44c2, E5p29d. The relevant demonstrations also apply to cognition of the third kind.

[8] Spinoza points out that one may find the fourth proportional because one remembers what one learned in school or because one has stumbled upon this method by generalizing from one's experience. Yet these cognitions are not adequate, as one does not understand why the mathematical operations yield the missing fourth proportional (but if one "sees the force" of Euclid's Book VII, proposition 19, one *does* have such understanding, and so one's calculating cognition is adequate).

[9] See Primus, "*Scientia intuitiva*" and "Reflective Knowledge." For a view that *scientia intuitiva* does not confer any epistemic benefits, see Malinowski-Charles, "Circle."

[10] I focus primarily on the *Ethics*. Whether Spinoza's views on *scientia intuitiva* changed over the course of Spinoza's life is not a question I will settle here. See *TIE* 18–29 (G II 10–13/C I 12–16) and *KV* 2.1–2 (G II 54–6/C I 96–9). For discussion, see Schechter, "Temporalities."

> We are distinguishing mental intuition from certain deduction on the grounds that we are aware of a movement or a sort of sequence in the latter but not in the former, and also because immediate self-evidence is not required for deduction, as it is for intuition. [*Regulae ad directionem ingenii* 3 (AT X 370/CSMK I 15)][11]

I agree that Spinoza's *scientia intuitiva* has the immediacy and self-evidence of Cartesian intuition. However, here I will argue that *scientia intuitiva* can be understood as a confluence of two intuitions, each of which resembles a *specific*—and well-known—Cartesian intuition.

This is how the rest of the chapter will proceed. In §1, I focus on the first component intuition of *scientia intuitiva*, which can be understood as an extension of Descartes's Fifth Meditation ontological argument—an "argument" proceeding from a clear and distinct conception of God's nature to the knowledge that God necessarily exists that Descartes characterizes as an intuition [*Second Replies* (AT VII 163–4/CSMK II 115)]. In §2, I suggest that *scientia intuitiva* is a confluence of the intuition described in §1 (what I will call "Intuition A") and a *cogito*-like intuition ("Intuition B").[12] As I explain, *scientia intuitiva*, so understood, turns out to be a powerful metaphysically self-locating cognition: with *scientia intuitiva*, one has an intuitive understanding of the correct monist ontology (Intuition A) as well as an intuitive understanding of *oneself* as existing in that monist framework (Intuition B).[13]

Scientia intuitiva is the terminus of a philosopher's path through adequate, true ideas to "salvation, or blessedness, or freedom." In the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, we find out that even if a person does not understand God as the adequately cognizing philosopher does, as the non-anthropomorphic God of the *Ethics*, they can still achieve a kind of salvation by being obedient to the God of theology—that is, to God taken to be a sovereign lawgiver who rewards those who obey and punishes those who do not (*TTP* 12 [G III 165/C II 255]; *TTP* 14 [G III 177–8/C II 268–70]; *TTP* 15 [G III 188/C II 281]).[14] Spinoza does not dwell on the distinction between reason and *scientia intuitiva* in the *TTP*, which makes sense: to elucidate how the theologian's and the philosopher's projects differ, he does not need to specify exactly how a merely reasoning philosopher differs from

[11] e.g. Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, 108; Nadler, *Spinoza's* Ethics, 181–2; Ellsiepen, "Types," 141.

[12] I am not alone in seeing a trace of the *cogito* in *scientia intuitiva*: Garber has also proposed that although the mind understood by *scientia intuitiva* (that is, the idea of the essence of the body conceived *sub specie aeternitatis*) is clearly not a Cartesian conception of mind, *scientia intuitiva* is like Descartes's *cogito* in being a direct intuitive grasp of one's own mind (Garber, "Knowing the Mind"; see also Naaman-Zauderer, "Freedoms," 217).

[13] This is a play on "self-locating beliefs," or beliefs about one's spatiotemporal location and identity. Others have also explored the role of subjective experience in Spinoza's project. See Renz, "Finite Subjects" and Julia Borcherding, "Subjectivity."

[14] That there is this other path is not, however, something that can be understood or demonstrated by natural light. It can only be given by revelation, and only be accepted with moral certainty [*TTP* 15 (G III 185/C II 278)].

a philosopher enjoying *scientia intuitiva*. In the conclusion, I consider the theologian, the reasoning philosopher, and the philosopher with *scientia intuitiva* alongside each other, and clarify the middle position of the merely reasoning philosopher.

1. Intuition A

There is a lot to say about Descartes's views on God, divine attributes, and the Fifth Meditation ontological argument, but for my purposes, it will be enough to say that for Descartes, God's existence can be proved by a simple intuition. Provided one has freed one's mind from prejudices (which working through the first four *Meditations* may help one do), one's conception of God is sufficient to get to the "conclusion" that God exists: to prove that God exists, one just attends to the idea of the supremely perfect being and sees, with a clear and distinct perception of the mind, that necessary existence belongs to God's essence.[15]

Even if those who do not have facility with the correct conception of God do not intuit God's existence directly from God's nature, they may still *deduce*, by a series of intuitions, God's existence. Consider the Third Meditation, in which the Meditator concludes that only a formally real infinite being, God, could have caused his idea of God [*Third Meditation* (AT VII 51/CSMK II 35)]. If one meditates with the Meditator, one sees that God must exist only after considering ideas of one's existence and of God in light of self-evident truths about causation (e.g. *ex nihilo nihil fit*), ontological dependence, and formal reality (i.e. the reality a thing has in virtue of existing or being actual) and objective reality (i.e. the reality of a representation in thought). The conclusion that God exists is not apprehended directly, in one intuition, from one's conception of God; rather, one reaches the conclusion through, to use the language of the *Regulae*, a "continuous and uninterrupted movement of thought" that proceeds through a sequence of intermediary intuitions [*Regulae* 3 (AT X 369–70/CSMK I 15)]. Such a deduction may help hone one's conception of God and put one in a position to prove God's existence by a simple intuition of the mind.[16]

The Cartesian ontological argument is an intuition that *God* is necessarily *formally real:* one understands, in an intuition, that God's essence must be a *formally real* essence, where God's formal reality is infinite and eternal. Spinoza agrees with Descartes that God's formal reality is infinite and eternal, as well as

[15] For Descartes's presentations of the argument, see *Fifth Meditation* (AT VII 65/CSMK II 45); *First Replies* (AT VII 114–20/CSMK II 82–5); *Second Replies* (AT VII 149–54, 166–7/CSMK II 106–9, 117–18); *Fifth Replies* (AT VII 383–4/CSMK II 263).

[16] The Third Meditation's arguments for the existence of God, as well as formalized versions of the Fifth Meditation's ontological argument, may serve as heuristic devices that may eventually be set aside (Nolan, "Therapy").

that if one has a clear and distinct idea of God's essence, one can immediately discern that God is necessarily formally real (E1p11d).[17] Famously, however, Spinoza holds that Descartes was mistaken about some crucial details. For Spinoza, if one has the correct conception of God (a conception that could be honed by working through the demonstrations of the *Ethics*), one understands that God is the *one and only* substance that can be conceived under different attributes, *including* extension.

In this section, I propose that *scientia intuitiva* can be understood as extending the Cartesian ontological argument. Given what Spinoza's God is, if one has an adequate (i.e. clear and distinct) idea of God, then it is not just that one can intuit that God necessarily exists: one can proceed from an adequate idea of what God must be to an adequate cognition of what all non-divine things must be.[18] One does not intuit from one's idea of God an adequate idea of any individuating essence, but one does understand, *in uno intuitu*, important truths about the formal reality of both God and things.[19] As I said above, I think that *scientia intuitiva* can be understood in terms of two intuitions. I will call the intuitive grasp of ontological truths that I discuss in this section "Intuition A."

A disclaimer: how the different elements of Spinoza's monist system fit together is up for debate, and in what follows, I will work from one view of the system, some aspects of which are unorthodox. First, on my view, all *modes* necessarily caused by and inhering in the infinite, eternal substance have the eternal, immutable, indivisible, unlimitable reality of eternal truths.[20] Second, I hold that for

[17] I will not focus here on how exactly Spinoza understood the ontological argument (either Descartes's or his own) and I will not discuss Spinoza's other arguments for the existence of God. For recent discussion and citations, see Lin, "Spinoza's Arguments"; Don Garrett, "Ontological"; and Martin, "Substantial Essence."

[18] The label is awkward in Spinoza's system, but I will use "non-divine" to refer to what is not God, or substance itself.

[19] E2p40s2 can be read as suggesting that *scientia intuitiva* is knowledge of a thing's individuating essence, understood as a unique property or set of properties: this cognition proceeds from "an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God" to the "adequate cognition of the [NS: formal] essence of things." Nevertheless, I think the text still accommodates my interpretation, although I admit that my reading requires that we not discount the NS's 'formal' as an erratum.

[20] I assume here that Spinoza's God, conceived under any attribute, is a *timelessly* eternal substance. See Primus, "Infinite Modes" for the argument that E1p21–3 can be read as demonstrations of the thesis that *all* things caused by an infinite and eternal substance are *infinite and eternal modes*. To be clear, the *infinite* reality of some eternal mode is not to be understood as some *indefinite* thing whose reality "goes beyond" any imposed bound. Rather, the mode enjoys the timeless eternal reality of eternal truths or Cartesian true and immutable natures. Such reality cannot be conceived as divisible or gradable: eternal truths are unlike enduring, finite things in that one eternal truth's reality cannot impinge upon or augment the reality of any other eternal truth—all eternal truths are equally immutably, eternally real. Such eternal reality is not indefinite: to suppose that reality surpasses any imposed bound is already to think of the reality as apt to be conceived in terms of bounds that are always surpassed, and that presupposes thinking of the reality as consisting of parts. (I should note that so long as one eternal truth E is distinct from another eternal truth F, there is also a sense in which E is "limited" because it is not also F: a cube is limited in not being a sphere. This sense of limitation, however, seems to be a "limitation" of properties or essence, rather than a limitation of the reality that essence enjoys. My point here is that while the reality of a finite, enduring cube can limit

Spinoza, finite things striving to endure in time cannot be understood as modes inhering in and caused by an infinite, eternal substance; it is as much of a mistake to think that an infinite, eternal God causes anything finite or enduring in time as it is to think that minds can cause bodies.[21] But there is still a sense in which God is the cause of all things and all things are modes: *one and the same* (non-divine) essence can be conceived either as enjoying either finite, enduring formal reality or infinite, eternal formal reality (cf. E5p29s)—it is just that in order to understand God's causation of things, those things (essences) must be conceived in the latter way.[22]

As I outline below, from an adequate conception of the formal reality of God, one can intuit not just that God necessarily exists, but also:

[1] that all of God's effects are necessary, infinite, eternal modes;
[2] that perceived finite, enduring things and infinite, eternal modes are one and the same essences conceived in different ways; and
[3] that everything can be conceived under different attributes.

This intuition (Intuition A) is complex: in intuiting all of this, one is obviously doing more than just recognizing that necessary existence belongs to God's essence. But this complex Spinozan intuition can be understood as an extension of the intuition we see in the Cartesian ontological argument. If one understands God's essence, one understands God as the one and only eternal, infinite substance which can be conceived under different attributes and which necessarily exists, but along with an intuition of God's necessary, eternal, infinite existence, one can intuit [1], [2], and [3].

and be limited by the reality of a finite, enduring sphere, the reality of a true and immutable cube cannot limit or be limited by the reality of a true and immutable sphere.)

[21] It is noncontroversial that causation must be within an attribute. It is certainly more controversial to hold that even within an attribute, "horizontal" causation (the transitive causation described in E1p28) and "vertical" causation (substance's immanent causation of modes) are also sequestered. Granted, there are ways to interpret Spinoza's text so that immanent and transitive causation work together. For example, perhaps God immanently causes pervasive features of the extended world described by laws of nature, and these features are necessary for transitive causation among finite things (see Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*). Or perhaps an infinite God immanently causes an infinite mode constituted by the entire transitive causal series taken as a whole (see D. Garrett, "Necessitarianism"). Yet I think it is possible to read Spinoza as describing exclusive explanatory frames. One and the same essence can be conceived either as enjoying eternal and infinite formal reality, in which case it is a mode immanently caused by an eternal and infinite substance, or as enjoying the enduring, finite formal reality, in which case it is causally affected by and affects other enduring, finite things. For more discussion, see my "Monism I," and "Monism II." For opposition to the idea that there are multiple conceptions of formal reality at work in Spinoza's system, see Lærke, "Eternity" and "Aspects."

[22] Where Descartes and others thought that an eternal and infinite God creates and conserves the very being of finite, enduring things, on my view, Spinoza deems such sustaining causation (causation *secundum esse*) unintelligible: for Spinoza, an eternal and infinite God *cannot* be the sustaining cause of the enduring world (even if that enduring world is sempiternal and boundless). This view leads to a kind of acosmism (see Primus, "Monism II" and §1.3 below). If one sees acosmism as absurd, one can take my project as buttressing the anti-Platonist reading developed by Lærke ("Eternity" and "Aspects"): unless we want to saddle Spinoza with an absurd position, we should not read him as working with multiple conceptions of formal reality.

The intuitions of [1]–[3] can be experienced as distinct from both the intuition of God's necessary existence and from each other. But it is likely that Spinoza, like Descartes before him, thought that these intuitions could be had together *in uno intuitu* (i.e. in Intuition A).[23] Descartes held that one can expand the scope of what is taken in in an intuition, thus minimizing one's reliance on one's fallible memory; with practice, one can experience as one intuition what one had previously experienced as a movement of one's thought through a sequence of intuitions [*Regulae* 7 (AT X 387–8/CSMK I 25)].

Furthermore, I think it is the case that one will not be able to have Intuition A without some common notions, or without a grasp of axiomatic truths. For example, given an understanding of God as the one substance, one can only see that what is not God must be a *mode* of God if one understands that whatever is not in and conceived through itself is in and conceived through another. That is, one cannot intuit [1] unless one already understands what is articulated in axioms E1a1 and E1a2. But I think even a Cartesian would agree that a cognition's reliance on some common notions does not mean that that cognition is not an intuition. For Descartes, "if we have deduced one fact from another immediately, then provided the inference is evident, it already comes under the heading of true intuition" [*Regulae* 7 (AT X 389/CSMK I 26)]. So if the deduction of things' basic ontological status (*all things are modes*) from God's reality (*God is the one and only substance*) and the relevant axioms is an immediate insight, then that deduction will count as a "true intuition." And one does not need to worry about acquiring the presupposed ideas: any presupposed common notions or ideas of axioms are adequate, or clear and distinct, in every human mind (E2p38c).

But before I say more about Intuition A, I need to clarify a few points about "formal essences" and the "adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God," the idea from which Spinoza says cognition of the third kind "proceeds" [*procedit*].

1.1 Formal Essences and Formal Reality

In E2p40s2, Spinoza announces that the third kind of cognition proceeds from an adequate idea of "the formal essence of certain attributes of God." A preliminary question is why "certain" attributes. I suspect this is just Spinoza's acknowledgment that the minds under discussion after E2p11—*human* minds—only conceive of extension and thought.

[23] Cf. Don Garrett's observation that *scientia intuitiva* may consist of discrete cognitive steps that are taken instantaneously in the mind ("Spinoza's Theory," 110). Intuition A and Intuition B (discussed below) can also be experienced together, and it is *this* intuition that I think is the intuition of *scientia intuitiva*.

A next question is what it is to have an adequate idea of the "formal essence" of, say, extension. The other mention of "formal essence" is E2p8, where I think Spinoza refines a point from E2p7 about true ideas in the infinite intellect of God.

In E2p7s, Spinoza says that an idea of a circle existing in nature and the circle existing in nature are both in God and are "one and the same thing, which is explicated through different attributes." I think Spinoza is here assuming familiarity with the notion of *objective reality*: an idea represents x in virtue of x being *objectively real* in thought. If the *objectively real circle* in thought and the *formally real circle* in the extended world are *one and the same* essence (i.e. *circle*) conceived under the attributes of thought and extension respectively, then there is a perfect agreement of the idea and its object (*ideatum*). That is, the idea is true (E1a6).[24]

E2p8 is obscure, but I think Spinoza is making a point that is, as he insists in E2p8d, clearly evident from E2p7 and its scholium. E2p7 presents the doctrine of parallelism: the "order and connection of ideas" in the infinite intellect of God, what is objectively real in thought, is the same as the "order and connection of things," or what is formally real in extension. E2p8 establishes that there is this parallelism of what is objectively real in thought and what is formally real in extension *sub specie aeternitatis*.[25] Consider a true idea that represents the true and immutable nature *circle*, i.e. represents the circle as something existing "in nature" as an eternal truth and not as something enduring and finite. Again, an idea represents x in virtue of x being objectively real in thought, so the idea represents this *eternal circle* because the *eternal circle* is *objectively real in thought.* There is a perfect agreement of the idea's *objectum* and its formally real *ideatum*: the *objectively real eternal circle* and the *formally real eternal circle* are one and the same essence conceived under different attributes.[26]

The eternally formally real circle is the "formal essence" mentioned in E2p8. This formal essence is an essence (*circle*) enjoying eternal formal reality as a

[24] For recent development of the idea that the key to understanding E2p7's "doctrine of parallelism" is the power of ideas to *represent* bodies, see Hübner, "Intentionality," "Representation," and "Limits."

[25] "The ideas of singular things, or of modes, that do not exist must be comprehended in God's infinite idea in the same way as the formal essences of the singular things, or modes, are contained in God's attributes" (E2p8). As I understand it, the "ideas of singular things…that do not exist" are not representations of singular things *as* non-existing but are instead representations of things (which may no longer be actual as finite, enduring things) *as* eternal truths; so understood, it is clear that, just as in E2p7, there is a "parallelism" of what is objectively real and what is formally real (I discuss this proposition in more detail in "Monism I"). This is not to say that Spinoza cannot explain how a mind represents something *b* as not presently actual (in the sense of enduring in time): if a mind has an idea of other actual, enduring things *c*, *d*, *f* that destroyed the thing, or prevented its existence, then a mind can represent *b* as not presently actual (cf. Lærke, "Aspects").

[26] E2p9 makes the point that the "order and connection of ideas" is the same as the "order and connection of things" *sub specie durationis*. The objectively real series of actual, enduring things and the formally real series of actual, enduring things are one and the same things conceived under different attributes.

mode of substance conceived under the attribute of extension. If one has a perfect understanding of the formal essence, one understands the circle's distinctive geometric properties. But one also understands the circle's *eternal formal reality*: one understands that the circle is eternally formally real as a mode caused by the eternally formally real extended substance. But one does not have an adequate idea of the mode's formal reality, the circle's "formal essence," unless one has an adequate idea of the substance's formal reality, the substance's "formal essence."

An adequate idea of the formal essence of extended *substance* differs in an important respect from the adequate idea of the formal essence of the circle. The adequate idea of extended substance represents substance as having its eternal formal reality by nature (E1p7), whereas the adequate idea of the eternal circle represents it as having its eternal formal reality in virtue of its cause. Importantly, although the extended substance is objectively real in thought, extended substance is not *just* objectively real in thought: infinite, eternal extended substance is *necessarily formally real*. To have an adequate idea of the "formal essence" of extended substance is to understand that extended substance is necessarily formally real.[27]

1.2 What Can Be Intuited from the Formal Essence of God: God's Effects Are Infinite Eternal Modes

So, when a mind has an adequate idea of a "formal essence," the mind understands the formal reality that essence enjoys. When the essence is, say, the

[27] I discuss the question of how a human mind represents substance in §2. One might complain, however, that the claim that *extended substance* is *objectively real in thought* is simply inconsistent with Spinoza's barrier between the attributes. This deserves its own paper, but I will briefly make three points. First, the claim that extended substance is objectively real in thought fits with Spinoza's insistence that there are two ways of conceiving *within* thought (E2p20–1). Conceived in one way, thinking substance is the representation of extended substance: so conceived, it is *objectively real extended substance*. Conceived in the other way, thinking substance is *formally real thinking substance*, or the *activity* of thinking. A mode of thinking substance can be conceived either as a *representation* of a mode of extended substance (i.e. an objectively real mode of extended substance), or as the *activity of thinking* conceived "without relation to its *objectum*" (E2p21s). Second, the claim that extended substance is objectively real in thought is consistent with there being no inter-attribute causation. Formally real extended substance does not cause there to be objectively real extended substance (or vice versa). Rather, formally real extended substance causes formally real extended substance and objectively real extended substance causes objectively real extended substance (where the latter way, again, is one way of conceiving of thinking substance causing thinking substance). Third, the claim only violates a conceptual barrier between attributes if such a barrier is taken to preclude thought from being characterized as a representation of extension. It seems, however, that Spinoza does not take the barrier in this way: after all, E2p13 is plausibly read as stating that the human mind is a representation of the human body ("the object of the idea [*objectum ideae*] constituting the human mind is the body"). If conception is just explanation, and explanation is *causal*, then there is a conceptual barrier between thinking substance (conceived as the objectively real extended substance) and the formally real extended substance. There is no inter-attribute causation: as just mentioned, an explanation of the existence of the objectively real extended substance is independent from the explanation of the existence of the formally real extended substance.

attribute extension, the mind understands that the essence is *necessarily* formally real. One could attend to such an idea of extension and see, in one intuition, that extended substance—God, the one and only substance conceived under the attribute of extension—necessarily exists; necessary existence belongs to God's essence. Yet more can be intuited from the "adequate idea of the formal essence" of extension, or from the understanding of extension as the one and only infinite, eternal, necessarily formally real extended substance. In this subsection and the next, I focus on what more can be intuited from God conceived as extended substance (restricting attention to one attribute will help keep the discussion from becoming too unwieldy).

Spinoza admits in E1p15s (G II 59/C I 424) that it is difficult to conceive of extended substance in the correct way. Yet Spinoza also insists that "God's infinite essence and eternity are known [*notam*] to all" (E2p47).[28] The attribute of extension is a "common notion" (cf. E2p38), albeit a special one.

One reason it is special is that it is prior to other common notions in the sense that other common notions presuppose it. To illustrate, consider Euclid's Common Notion Two, *if equals are added to equals, then the wholes are equal.* Every human mind has an adequate conception of this common notion (see E2p38c), but a conception of the common notion as a *necessary* truth about *extension* presupposes that they already have some understanding of extension and necessity. The necessity of some particular necessary truth is the "very necessity of God's eternal nature" (E2p44d). Furthermore, while perceived or imagined enduring bodies (e.g. wooden blocks) can be used as props in thinking about equals, wholes, and addition, we cannot use such perceptions or imaginations in our thinking about infinite, eternal, unique, indivisible extension itself: people "do not have so clear a cognition of God [here conceived under the attribute of extension] as they do of the common notions comes from the fact that they cannot imagine God, as they can bodies" (E2p47s).[29] Common notions and adequate ideas of properties of things involve the attribute of extension (E2p45), but human minds, constantly assailed as they are by ideas of external (enduring) bodies, find it difficult to attend to a conception of extension as infinite, indivisible, unique, and eternal.

[28] Cf. *TTP* 1 (G III 16/C II 78) and Descartes's claim the idea of God is innate in every human mind (*Third Meditation* [AT VII 51/CSMK II 35]).

[29] We can use imaginative props—images and diagrams—when reasoning about the necessary properties of a triangle because the properties of which we can have adequate ideas (e.g. geometric properties) remain the same whether we conceive of a triangle as enjoying the reality of a true and immutable triangle or as enjoying the reality of a drawing on a page (or whether we conceive the triangle as an object in thought or as formally real in extension). But the understanding of an attribute does not remain fixed across various conceptions of reality: the attribute *is* the reality. While a picture of a triangle can help us attend to geometric properties, no image can help us attend to infinite, eternal extended formal reality.

The demonstrations of the *Ethics* exploit the relative ease of working with common notions and adequate ideas of properties of things. Given some uncontroversial definitions and self-evident axioms (which are, presumably, common notions), one can come to understand, by a series of intuitions, that there is just *one* extended substance (E1p5) and that this unique substance is not the divisible whole consisting of parts (E1p12, E1p13), nor something caused by another substance that is not itself extended (E1p6), but rather a self-causing (E1p6, E1p7), infinite (E1p8), eternal, and necessarily existing substance (E1p11). The ideas operative in one's deductions are common notions and adequate ideas of properties of things. But reasoning to what extended substance must be like can help one attend to the correct conception of extended substance.

And once one conceives of extended substance as the one and only infinite, eternal, necessary extended substance, it seems one can intuit [1] that all of substance's effects are necessary, infinite, eternal modes.

First, given that one understands that anything that is is either a substance or a mode,[30] one can, it seems, move immediately from an adequate idea that there is just *one* infinite, eternal, necessarily existing extended substance to the understanding that any extended thing that is not the one extended substance must be a *mode* of that substance.[31]

Second, one can intuit that these modes *exist necessarily*. Provided one understands that the "intellect infers more properties the more reality the essence of the defined thing involves" (which one will, as this is something that Spinoza treats in E1p16d as a fact that anyone can attend to), one can immediately understand that from the nature of extended substance there must "follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes." One can immediately understand that these things (understood as *modes* of substance) also necessarily exist: in causing itself to exist, the one and only necessarily existing extended substance necessarily causes all its modes to exist.

Third, one can intuit that all these necessarily existing modes are *infinite* and *eternal*.[32] One understands that extended substance's formal reality is (extended) "existence itself" and that this formal reality is conceived "as an eternal truth" that "cannot be explicated by duration or time" (E1d8). Substance's formal reality is

[30] Understanding that everything that is is either a substance or a mode does not require reasoning through a demonstration. The first two axioms of the *Ethics* are "whatever is, is either in itself or in another" (E1a1) and "what cannot be conceived through another, must be conceived through itself" (E1a2). 'Substance' is defined as what is in and conceived through itself, while 'mode' is defined as what is in and conceived through another (E1d3, E1d5).

[31] One can also arrive at this understanding by a series of thoughts, as when one works through, and sees the force of, more of the demonstrations of Part 1 of the *Ethics*.

[32] In E1p10s, Spinoza says that attributes express necessity, *sive* eternity, and in E2p44c2, he says that to conceive something *sub specie aeternitatis* is to conceive it as necessity. While I think that all eternal modes do exist necessarily (in virtue of their cause, substance, and not by their own nature), I do not think that all it is to be eternal is to exist necessarily. As I see it, to be eternal is to have necessitated reality that is not *in time*.

itself infinite and eternal, so being infinite and being eternal are not *ways* that "existence itself" is modified—*existence itself* is infinite and eternal.[33] One understands that what is not substance itself is a mode of substance, as well as that modes ontologically depend on substance; just as a wrinkle in fabric is a way that fabric is modified, modes of substance are ways that the formal reality of substance is modified. If one understands that modes enjoy the very reality of the substance in which they inhere, and that substance's reality is itself infinite and eternal, then it seems one can immediately understand that all of an infinite, eternal substance's modes must enjoy infinite and eternal formal reality, and that what is non-infinite and non-eternal are not modes of an infinite and eternal substance.[34] To be clear, to have infinite, eternal reality here is to have *non*-finite reality, which cannot be thought of as gradable or limitable or in time: it is to have the reality of eternal truths.[35] If one understands substance to cause itself to exist *as an eternal truth* (see E1d8ex.), then one can understand that all its modes also exist as *eternal truths*.[36]

It seems all three realizations could be experienced in one intuition: from an understanding of the one and only infinite, eternal, necessarily existing extended substance, one immediately understands that whatever is not extended substance itself is formally real as an infinite, eternal mode necessarily caused by extended substance. This intuition can be understood as an extension of the Cartesian ontological argument. Once one understands that God (here conceived as extended substance) necessarily exists, one can immediately understand that, and what, everything else is.

Yet the intuited understanding that whatever is not the infinite, eternal extended substance is an infinite, eternal mode necessarily caused by and inhering in that substance seems false: what about all of the perceived finite,

[33] One could say that there are infinite and eternal things and non-infinite and non-eternal things and insist that both are ways that "existence itself" is modified. But if substance's "infinite" and "eternal" reality were a more generic existence, I think it becomes harder to explain why Spinoza argues that even within an attribute, an infinite and eternal substance must have infinite and eternal effects (see esp. E1p21–3).

[34] Admittedly, one might say that this is too simplistic: Spinozistic modes need not *literally* enjoy the reality of the substance in which they inhere. How to understand Spinoza's mode-substance relation is, of course, a fraught issue that I cannot settle here; here I assume that Spinoza does have a more simplistic model in mind. Note that there is a sense in which a non-infinite, non-eternal thing can be conceived to be a mode: it can be thought of as a way that non-infinite, non-eternal reality is modified. Yet this non-infinite, non-eternal reality is not the reality of *substance*, properly conceived.

[35] A true and immutable nature is as real as it will ever be and cannot, indeed, be understood as having less (or more) of the reality it enjoys (an enduring body, in contrast, is such that it can be conceived as enduring for longer or being bigger than it actually is [see E2d2]).

[36] One can also arrive at the understanding that all of substance's modes are infinite and eternal by a series of thoughts—for example, by working through, and seeing the force of, certain demonstrations of the *Ethics*. While this is a non-standard reading, I think that the stretch of the *Ethics* from E1p15–E1p23 establishes that everything that an infinite, eternal substance causes must be infinite, eternal modes of that substance: while Descartes's God creates concrete bodies and eternal truths, Spinoza's God, properly conceived, *only* causes eternal truths (see my "Infinite Modes").

non-eternal bodies that come to be and pass away? In the next subsection, I describe a further extension of the Cartesian ontological argument—one that could be experienced *in uno intuitu* with the extension just described—that clarifies where finite, non-eternal things fit into the picture.

1.3 Finite Enduring Things

The perceived extended world seems to be a refutation of the thesis that whatever is not extended substance itself is an *infinite*, *eternal* mode caused by and inhering in substance. Isn't it obvious that one's own body and the other bodies affecting one's body cannot be infinite, eternal modes necessarily caused by infinite, eternal substance?[37]

If one had arrived at the thesis by reasoning through demonstrations, one might, given the thesis's putative inconsistency with experience, revisit the proofs, checking each step for a mistake.[38] But even if one finds those proofs to be impeccable, one may at some later point rely on memory to summon the thesis, recalling the conclusion but not the reasons for it. In that case, one's ineluctable experiences of finite, enduring bodies may prompt one to suppose that what is true is that all things are *modes*, not that all things are *infinite*, *eternal* modes; one may think that finite, concrete bodies and eternal truths are both modes caused by and inhering in the one infinite, eternal substance—they are just different kinds of modes, caused in different ways by the infinite, eternal substance.

When the idea of the formal reality of all bodies is intuited, however, there is no room for second-guessing and no need to rely on fallible memory. One is certain that whatever is not extended substance is an infinite, eternal, necessary mode caused by extended substance. But even if one is certain of this, it seems that one still cannot deny that there are things—*finite*, *enduring* things—that are patently not infinite and eternal modes. How can *all things* be infinite, eternal modes if there are finite, enduring things?

The tension is removed once one realizes that one and the same *essence*, or set of properties, can be conceived as enjoying either the formal reality of a true and immutable nature (e.g. a true and immutable nature *sphere*) or the formal reality of a finite, changeable, divisible, limitable, enduring body (an actual sphere). All things are infinite, eternal modes in the sense that *all essences* following from the

[37] It is axiomatic that one feels one's body to be affected (E2a4), where this default idea of one's body is of something actual, finite, and enduring (E2p11, E2p13).

[38] If one is able to hold all the premises in mind, one can be sure of the conclusion if one has indeed reasoned and "seen the force of the demonstrations" (E2p40s2). This is speculative, but I think Spinoza would admit that it is difficult to focus on the demonstration and keep everything in mind, given that one's enduring body is ceaselessly affected by other bodies (see E4p2–4). One may consequently have to rely on memory, an inadequate kind of cognition (E2p40s2).

divine nature are infinite, and eternal modes necessarily caused by the one infinite, eternal substance. Enduring, finite things are not modes, but the essences of those things can be conceived *sub specie aeternitatis* as infinite, eternal modes.[39] This tension-removing realization is the intuition of [2].

This intuition demotes the formal reality of enduring, finite things. Before one had reflected so carefully on the nature of extension, one may have privileged the more familiar concrete formal reality of bodies in one's thinking about *formal reality* or *actuality*. Perhaps one thought, in a broadly Aristotelian vein, that when one thinks of the "eternal truths" of geometry, one is just selectively attending to or abstracting from features of finite, enduring bodies, and that there are only such truths so long as finite, enduring bodies are real—such truths do not enjoy some eternal formal reality on their own. Or, perhaps one thought, in a broadly Platonist vein, that eternal truths do enjoy some formal reality independently of enduring concreta, and also thought, along with Descartes and many others, that the divisible, limitable formal reality of those concreta is something real that has a cause: viz. God, who creates and conserves the very being of everything over time.[40]

Once one has reflected more carefully on the nature of extension, one does not cease experiencing finite, enduring things transitively caused by other finite, enduring things, but one does realize that the infinite, eternal substance does not cause the finite, enduring formal reality of those things—*all* of an infinite, eternal substance's effects are formally real as infinite and eternal modes.[41] There is an explanation *F* of the coming to be of body (or affection of a body) at a certain

[39] Cf. "we conceive of things as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature. But the things we conceive in this second way as true, that is, real, we conceive *sub specie aeternitatis*, and their ideas involve the eternal and infinite essence of God" (E5p29). As I understand the *Ethics*, Spinoza describes causation *sub specie aeternitatis* in the "infinite mode" propositions (E1p21–3) and causation *sub specie durationis* in proposition E1p28. Propositions E2p8–9 make the point that there are true *ideas* of both *sub specie aeternitatis* and *sub specie durationis* causation, or that the same causal structures can be conceived either under the attribute of thought or the attribute of extension.

[40] Descartes thought that eternal truths and enduring bodies and minds are both caused by an eternal, infinite God (AT I 152, IV 118, V 224, VII 48–9, VIII A 13), but the extent to which Descartes is a Platonist is up for debate (for recent discussion and citations, see Rozemond, "Eternal Truths" and Hattab, "Alternative"). The thought (described a few paragraphs above) that finite concreta and eternal truths are different kinds of modes inhering in and caused by the infinite, eternal substance looks a lot like the Cartesian picture, albeit with some change in terminology (and a different understanding of the freedom involved in divine creation). On my interpretation, Spinoza makes an even more radical departure from the Cartesian picture.

[41] I think there are *two* main conditions for intelligible causation in Spinoza: first, the causal relata must be conceived under the same attribute, and second, the causal relata must be conceived as real, or actual, in the same way. It is thus unintelligible to suppose that the timelessly eternal, infinite extended substance could cause anything enduring, even if that enduring thing also conceived under the attribute of extension (and even if that thing is everlasting and indefinite). In denying the intelligibility of an infinite, eternal God causing finite, enduring things, Spinoza can be understood as criticizing the Cartesian view of God's creation and conservation of the world. See my "Monism I" and "Monism II" for more discussion and defense.

place and time, but the explanans and explananda are *properties*. An individual body comes to be from other bodies when a certain ratio of motion and rest comes into being, and to understand that coming to be, one understands the properties of the constituent extended parts and how properties necessitate other properties: understanding how a pumpkin or ship initially came to be means understanding how some configurations of some bits of extended reality with certain properties interacted to reconfigure other bits of extended reality with certain properties.[42] An individual body persists if a certain ratio of motion and rest persists: understanding the continued endurance over time of a pumpkin or ship means understanding how some configurations of bits of extended reality with certain properties interacted so that some bits of extended reality were not reconfigured.[43] In these explanations *secundum fieri*, it is presupposed that bits of extended reality (or an extended enduring substratum)[44] are (is) actual or formally real. There is, however, no causal explanation *C* of the very being, an explanation *secundum esse*, of enduring formal reality. In other systems (e.g. Descartes's), *God* is such a sustaining cause of things enduring over time. But in Spinoza's system (as I understand it), the infinite, eternal substance is *only* the sustaining cause of infinite, eternal modes; the infinite, eternal substance is not the *causa secundum esse* of enduring formal reality.[45] However, what lacks a cause is not real. It is only when an essence is conceived as enjoying eternal, infinite formal reality that its formal reality has a causal explanation and is thus real.[46]

[42] Given the infinite complexity of nature, human minds may not be able to have adequate ideas of how some specific actual body came to be, but this is compatible with the human mind having some adequate ideas of the geometric properties of extension (e.g. insofar as extended reality is perfectly spherical, it has certain other geometric properties).

[43] In the first lemma of the Physical Digression following E2p13s, Spinoza says that "bodies are distinguished from one another by reason of motion and rest, speed and slowness, and not by reason of substance" [L1]. Spinoza then goes on to explain that an *individual* can undergo some changes without ceasing to be that individual: an individual may have some composite bodies replaced by other bodies, grow or shrink, or have its parts change direction, but so long as the same "ratio of motion and rest" [*ratio motus et quietis*] is maintained, the individual persists (see L4–7). The "nature" or "form" of an individual is, in this discussion, the ratio of motion and rest. My focus here is on individuals or composite bodies, and I am deferring discussion of debates about, for example, the nature of the simplest bodies. For more discussion of metaphysical individuation and the ratio of motion and rest, see Bennett, *Study*; Garber, "Persistence"; D. Garrett, "Metaphysical Individuation"; Gueroult, *Spinoza II*; Matheron, *Individu*; Melamed, "Weak Individuals"; and Newlands, *Reconceiving*.

[44] *Sub specie durationis*, essences enjoy reality as distinct *res*. There can be such conception of discrete entities—and thus efficient causation that is *transitive*, with an effect being temporally or spatially "outside" its cause—because extended formal reality is, when conceived *sub specie durationis*, divisible and composed of parts.

[45] There are texts that seem to conflict with my claim that the infinite, eternal substance is not an immanent, sustaining cause of the reality of finite, enduring things: for example, in E1p25c, Spinoza says that "particular things are nothing but…modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way" (see also E1p24, E1p25). For discussion, see my "Monism II."

[46] Whether Spinoza has a good account of how or why we experience things as finite and existing "in relation to a certain time and place" (E5p29s) at all is not a question I can answer here. For an overview of other acosmist interpretations of Spinoza (and a survey of questions acosmists must answer), see Newlands, "Hegel's Idealist Reading" and "Recent Idealist Readings."

I have suggested that from an understanding of the formal reality of extended substance, one can immediately understand the formal reality of everything else that is extended—as well as understand that the familiar formal reality of finite, enduring things is not ultimately understandable.[47] As rich as this intuition is, I think cognition of the third kind is richer, as it does not proceed from an understanding of God conceived under just one attribute, but from an understanding of God as the one and only substance that can be conceived under different attributes. Folding in this additional complexity will take us to the intuition of [3], that everything can be conceived under different attributes.

1.4 What Can Be Intuited from the Formal Essence of God: All Modes Are Conceivable under Different Attributes

Like the attribute of extension, the attribute of thought is, for Spinoza, a common notion. All human minds understand extension and thought to be basic, conceptually sequestered realities: everyone understands that their perception of a body and the body itself are distinct kinds of things (although they may erroneously assume that there can be causation between these realities). And all human minds have some adequate ideas of necessary properties of those realities.

For example, even toddlers understand that extension is *always and everywhere* such that if they imaginatively superimpose the image of their own pie slice over the image of their sibling's slice and they coincide, then the slices are the same size; they understand, that is, what Euclid articulated as Common Notion Four (*things which coincide with one another are equal to one another*). The toddlers' understanding of this eternal truth implicates an understanding of the eternal, infinite extended substance. Yet, as mentioned in §1.2, not every human mind finds it easy to attend to extension as eternal, infinite, and necessarily formally real.

It is less clear what the features of thought are that every mind understands to be necessary, where thought is conceived not as objectively real extension but as thought "without relation to the object" (E2p21). Perhaps an axiom like "man thinks [NS: or, to put it differently, we know that we think]" (E2a2) is such a common notion. But here again, although every human mind might grasp such axioms, not every human mind will find it easy to attend to thought as eternal, infinite, and necessarily formally real: one may easily be tempted to think of all

[47] On my reading, Spinoza's commitment to the intelligibility of divine sustaining causation leads him to deny the reality of the familiar enduring world but not to deny the reality of an infinity of infinite, eternal modes. For an even more sweeping acosmist reading, see Michael Della Rocca, "Rationalism."

thought in the same terms one tends to think of one's own mind—i.e. as enduring over time and composed of ideas whose power (and longevity) vary.[48]

And even if one understands that extension and thought are each conceived through themselves, that there is just one infinite, eternal, and necessarily formally real extended substance and just one infinite, eternal, necessarily formally real thinking substance, and that neither is the cause of the other, it seems that one may still fail to recognize that in either case, one is conceiving of the *same* substance under two different attributes, and that this substance is *God*, the only substance that can be or be conceived. One's understanding of extended substance and thinking substance is an understanding of "*God*'s eternal and infinite essence" (E2p47), but not under that description.[49]

But suppose, perhaps with the help of the *Ethics*, that one comes to understand that God is the one and only necessarily existing substance "consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence" (E1p11, E1p14). One understands thought and extension as attributes of God (E2p1, E2p2), and understands that "the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that" (E2p7s). One understands that the objectively real extended substance and the formally real extended substance are one and the same substance conceived under different attributes, as well as that substance conceived under the attribute of thought can be conceived either as the objectively real extended substance or as the activity of thinking (i.e. as just the formal reality of thinking, bracketing what is being thought).[50]

If one has this understanding of God, it seems one can intuit even more about the ontology of things.[51] First, once one understands that one and the same infinite, eternal, necessarily existing substance can be understood under different

[48] Just as one might use finite wooden blocks to help one reason about properties of extension (§1.2), one might use one's experience as a finite, enduring thinking thing to help one reason about properties of thought (conceived as the activity of thinking).

[49] How to fit together Spinoza's claims about the causal and conceptual independence of the attributes and his claim that there is just *one* substance is tricky. Here I am assuming something like Don Garrett's view that the infinitely many attributes are each different "fundamental manners of its existence" ("Logic of the Attributes").

[50] See note 27.

[51] As I mentioned, everyone comes equipped with some adequate ideas of properties of extension and thought, as well as an understanding of thought and extension as distinct fundamental kinds of realities; these are the "inborn tools" (cf. *TIE* 32 [G II 14/C I 17]) that enable everyone to understand that there is just *one* substance that is conceived under different attributes and that this substance is God. I think it is the latter, more complex understanding of ontology from which *scientia intuitiva* proceeds. The text is unclear, but when Spinoza writes in E2p47s that from the knowledge of God's infinite and eternal essence that everyone has, we can "deduce…a great many things which we know adequately, and so can form the third kind of cognition," I do not think he is saying that the third kind of cognition *is* the deduction from the knowledge that everyone has. Rather, I think he is saying that from our default understanding of extension and thought, we can deduce (perhaps by following the demonstrations of the *Ethics*) that there is just *one* substance conceived under different attributes, etc. *Scientia intuitiva* can proceed from this deduced understanding of God.

attributes, one can immediately see that one and the same infinite, eternal, necessary mode can be conceived under the attribute of extension or under the attribute of thought: one can understand that an objectively real eternal truth regarding extension and the formally real eternal truth are one and the same eternal mode conceived under different attributes.[52] Second, one can immediately see that the idea of an enduring body and the enduring body itself are one and the same enduring thing conceived under different attributes.[53] Third, one can immediately see that a finite, enduring body (or a mind) and an infinite, eternal mode of substance conceived under the attribute of extension (thought) are one and the same essence conceived as enjoying different kinds of extended formal reality.[54] And fourth, one can immediately understand that within the attribute of thought, any idea can be conceived either in terms of what is represented (i.e. in terms of objective reality) or as the formally real activity of thinking. Crucially, one can realize that the activity of thinking some eternal truth and some (objectively real) eternal truth are one and the same infinite, eternal mode conceived in different ways within the attribute of thought.[55] The importance of this specific realization will become clearer below in §2.

1.5 Preparing for Intuition

Descartes held that the intuition constituting his ontological argument might require preparation—e.g. reasoning through formal arguments—even if intuition is effortless once one has the right conception of God:

> …I ask my readers to spend a great deal of time and effort on contemplating the nature of the supremely perfect being. Above all they should reflect on the fact that the ideas of all other natures contain possible existence, whereas the idea of God contains not only possible but wholly necessary existence. This alone, without a formal argument, will make them realize that God exists; and this will

[52] One can also arrive at this understanding by reasoning through a demonstration: this is what I take E2p8, sketched above, to establish (see also E5p22).

[53] Again, one can also understand this by reasoning through a demonstration: E2p9 (see also E5p21).

[54] See E5p23d, E5p29s.

[55] This can also be understood by reasoning through demonstrations: "Thought is an attribute of God (E2p1), and so, by E2p3 [in God there is necessarily an idea, both of his essence and of everything which necessarily follows from his essence], there must necessarily be in God an idea both of [NS: thought] and of all of its [thought's] affections" (E2p20d). In E5p31d, Spinoza makes explicit that the human mind's activity of thinking some eternal truth and some eternal truth are the same eternal mode conceived in different ways: "The mind conceives nothing *sub specie aeternitatis* except insofar as it conceives its body's essence *sub specie aeternitatis* (by E5p29), that is (by E5p21 and E5p23), except insofar as it is eternal. So (by E5p30), insofar as it is eternal, it has knowledge of God, knowledge which is necessarily adequate (by E2p46)."

> eventually be just as self-evident to them as the fact that the number two is even or that three is odd, and so on. There are certain truths which some people find self-evident, while others come to understand them only by means of a formal argument. [*Second Replies* (AT VII 163–4/CSMK II 115)]

The Intuition A of *scientia intuitiva* might also require preparation: one may need to work through the demonstrations of the *Ethics* to attend to the right (Spinozan) conception of God, for it to be self-evident that God, the one and only infinite, eternal substance that can be conceived under different attributes, exists. But just as anyone for whom *two is even* is self-evident can intuit other mathematical truths, so anyone for whom the Spinozan conception of God is self-evident can intuit other ontological truths.

This, I take it, is the point behind the example in E2p40s2 quoted at the outset of the chapter. Given a firm grasp of the ratio 1/2, it will be self-evident that given the number 3, the missing fourth proportional is the number 6.[56] One could provide a Euclidean demonstration of why the answer is 6, but in such a simple case, no demonstration is required to see the answer and recognize that answer's truth. Similarly, one could provide demonstrations of ontological truths like *all of God's effects are infinite and eternal modes*, but if one has a firm grasp of the right conception of God, then no demonstration is required: one simply understands, *in uno intuitu*, the ontology of things.[57]

But *scientia intuitiva* is not just Intuition A, which I have described as an extension of the Cartesian ontological argument. It also involves something like the *cogito*, an intuition I will call Intuition B.

2. Intuition B

In E5p36s, Spinoza says that "the cognition of singular things" he has called *scientia intuitiva* is much more powerful than the "universal cognition" of reason. *Scientia intuitiva*'s power is often taken to lie in its specificity: a common view is that reasoning can only deliver knowledge of what is common to things (adequate ideas of properties and common notions), but *scientia intuitiva* delivers knowledge of the individuating essences of singular things.[58] On some interpretations,

[56] It is not clear where the key intuition is supposed to be in the example. I have come to think that the inference to the answer (6) is what is intuited, but in my "*Scientia intuitiva*," I suggested that the *ratio* 1:2 was the intuition.

[57] I think Spinoza was optimistic that many human beings can enjoy *scientia intuitiva*. For more discussion of the extent to which *scientia intuitiva* is available to all human beings, see Sharp, "*Nemo non videt*."

[58] For a few statements of the view that *scientia intuitiva* is distinguished from reason in being knowledge of the unique essences of particulars, see Gueroult, *Spinoza II*, 417; Carr, "Rational and Intuitive Knowledge," 243; Bennett, *Study*, 368–9; Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, 109–10; Della Rocca,

one has knowledge of specific essences in virtue of having knowledge of a lot of causal detail: Nadler, for example, proposes that in *scientia intuitiva*, one grasps, in a single act of mind, a thing's causal and conceptual connections "not just to other objects but, more importantly, to the attributes of God, the infinite modes (the laws of nature) that follow immediately from them, and the 'common notions' that pick out features present in all modes of an attribute."[59] On other interpretations, *scientia intuitiva* is not an intuitive apprehension of so much causal detail, but is nevertheless knowledge of unique essences: Soyarslan, for example, holds that *scientia intuitiva* is knowledge of the unique actual essence of a thing (its striving to persevere) as this essence follows from the eternal necessity of God's nature, where this knowledge "descends to a level of particularity that reason cannot."[60]

In §1 of this chapter, I suggested gloss of *scientia intuitiva* given in E2p40s2 can be read with the emphasis on the *formal*, rather than on the *essences*, in the "formal essences of things": once one has an understanding of the formal reality of God, one understands the *formal reality* of all the essences following from the divine nature. Cognition of the second kind could deliver this same understanding of ontology, albeit by a different route that begins with common notions or axioms and proceeds through a series of adequate cognitions (the intuitions of each step of a demonstration). What I still need to do is give an account of the contrast between the "universal cognition" that is reason and the "cognition of singular things" that is *scientia intuitiva* which Spinoza gives in E5p36s.

In this section, I try to explain how *scientia intuitiva* is a distinctively powerful cognition of singular things. If one has Intuition A, one does not just understand, in *uno intuitu*, general truths about ontology. One also understands, by a *cogito*-like Intuition B, something about one's own existence, or formal reality, as that which is understanding (in Intuition A) these truths of ontology: one understands that one's own mind, insofar as it is understanding these truths, is an eternal, infinite mode necessarily caused by God (conceived under the attribute of thought). One understands that the intellectual activity one experiences from the first-personal point of view just is the activity of God's intellect.[61]

Mind-Body Problem, 86; Soyarslan, "The Distinction" and "Ordinary Life to Blessedness"; and Renz, *Explainability*, 251. Carr observes that E5p36s does not settle whether *scientia intuitiva* is *only* cognition of the essences of singular things ("Rational and Intuitive Knowledge"). Cf. Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, 109–10; and Hübner "Essences," 62–3.

[59] Nadler, "Baruch Spinoza." For Nadler, what is known by cognition of the second and third kinds is the same; cognition of the third kind involves an "epistemic compression" (*Spinoza's Ethics*, 181–2). According to Don Garrett, *scientia intuitiva* is of knowledge of causal detail, but while God knows all truths by *scientia intuitiva*, human beings can only know universal, general features by *scientia intuitiva* ("Spinoza's Theory," 111. Cf. Wilson, "Infinite Understanding").

[60] "The Distinction," 42. Cf. Fløistad, "Theory," 60; and Klein, "By Eternity," 300.

[61] For more discussion on the eternity of the mind, see Carlisle, "Eternal Life"; Grey, "Composition"; Klein, "Intellectual Eternity"; Lærke, "Eternity"; LeBuffe, "Change"; Nadler, *Heresy*; and Parchment, "Mind's Eternity."

Scientia intuitiva is simultaneously an intuitive understanding of the structure of reality and an intuitive understanding of *one's own understanding mind* as in that very structure.[62] One has cognitions of other things in virtue of having ideas of affections of one's own body (E2p25); *scientia intuitiva* also serves to situate other things—*this* or *that* thing—as in the monist system too.[63]

I begin by saying a bit more about the awareness of one's own activity that attends all adequate ideas or acts of understanding. I then propose an explanation of why *intuiting* an understanding of ontology from the "adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God" affects the mind more than *reasoning* to that understanding.

2.1 Ideas of Ideas, Knowing That One Knows

In the "ideas of ideas" discussion of E2p20–1, Spinoza argues that one and the same thing can be conceived *within* the attribute of thought in two ways, either as the "idea," or the "idea of the idea," which is "nothing but the form of the idea [*forma ideae*] insofar as this is considered as a mode of thinking without relation to the object [*objectum*]" (E2p21s). As soon as one knows, Spinoza elaborates, one knows that one knows, and so on, *in infinitum*.

This is obscure, but here is my preferred interpretation.[64] Any act of thinking can be conceived either (a) in terms of *what* is being thought about, the "idea" or what is objectively real in thought, or (b) as the "idea of the idea" or the *activity of thinking*. For example, an adequate idea of a true and immutable circle can be conceived either as (a) the *objectively real* true and immutable circle or as (b) the *formally real activity of thinking* that true and immutable circle. What is distinctive about the formal reality of thought is that it presents some content to mind, but at least when the ideas are adequate, this is not *mere* presence to mind, but

[62] Soyarslan has similarly underscored that there is an "indexical component" involved in intuitive self-knowledge that enables me to recognize "that the particular instance of power, which I understand 'to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature' (E5p29s) is *my* power or conatus" ("The Distinction," 44). Yet I disagree with Soyarslan that in order to account for the distinctive power of *scientia intuitiva*, we should understand it as knowledge of a specific content (i.e. an individuating essence, or the unique property, or perhaps properties, that makes a thing the very thing it is and not some other thing) that simply cannot be known by cognition of the second kind (see "The Distinction," 42). I tend to see reason and *scientia intuitiva* as more complementary: I think essences, or at least some of a thing's essential properties, can be cognized by reason, and I think reasoning about metaphysics can prepare a mind for *scientia intuitiva* (see §2.2 below). Yet I agree with Soyarslan's general point that *scientia intuitiva* is an intuitive grasp of "our power as a manifestation and consequence of God's power" ("The Distinction," 44).

[63] For other interpretations stressing the primacy of self-knowledge in *scientia intuitiva*, see Garber, "Knowing the Mind"; Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, 138–40; Sharp, "*Nemo non videt*"; Soyarslan, "The Distinction."

[64] See my "Reflective Knowledge." For other treatments of the "ideas of ideas" doctrine, see Edwin Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 114–50; Melamed, *Substance and Thought*, 154; Morrison, "Two Puzzles," 66–8.

rather luminous understanding: when one's idea, conceived in terms of some content *z*, is adequate, or completely explained by content (or contents) *w* in one's mind, one *understands* z, and in understanding *z*, one also automatically knows that one is understanding *z*. To have an adequate idea is to understand (E2p43s), and whenever a mind understands something, that mind knows that it is understanding something: the mind knows that it knows.[65] I take appeal to knowing that one knows and so on, to infinity in E2p21s, not as the statement that there is an infinite hierarchy of ideas within the attribute of thought, but rather as a statement that the reflective knowledge one has cannot be made any better than it already is. When one understands *z*, one is as certain as one could be that one understands *z*.[66]

Because understanding is also always accompanied by the knowledge that one understands, understanding—whether that understanding is cognition of the second kind or cognition of the third—always comes with an apprehension and appreciation of one's own power.[67] One understands *z* and knows that one's understanding is something one is doing by one's own power alone. From the first-person perspective, it is clear that one's own mind is doing the thinking and that one is understanding *z* because one understands *w*. The experience one has with inadequate cognition—remembering, perceiving, or imagining—is different. One experiences one's remembering, perceiving, and imagining as one's own acts of thinking,[68] but that one is thinking about what one is thinking about is not experienced as the result of one's own effort and activity alone. The contents of the ideas (or what is objectively real) are not fully explained by the contents of other ideas in one's mind and the fact that one is thinking these thoughts (and not others) is also not fully explained by the one's other acts of thinking.

2.2 Reasoning without a Kind of Recognition

By "seeing the force of" the demonstrations of the *Ethics*, by reasoning from axioms (i.e. common notions) and adequate ideas of properties of things, one can come to understand (and know that one understands) that any essence can be conceived either as an eternal, infinite mode necessarily caused by God or as an enduring, finite thing necessarily caused by other enduring finite things. One can

[65] "Reflective Knowledge" (cf. Carriero, "Intellectual Experience").

[66] One's intellect can thus rest or be satisfied. Cf. Spinoza's criticism of the Baconian "unquiet" human understanding that "can neither take a stand nor rest [*quod intellectus humanus gliscat, neque consistere, aut acquiescere possit*]" [Ep 2, Spinoza to Oldenburg, September 1661 (G IV 9/C I 167)].

[67] See E4p52. Whenever there is an adequate idea, there is *acquiescentia in se ipso.*

[68] Perhaps Spinoza would be willing to acknowledge that some inadequate cognition may not be experienced as *one's own* thinking. In the phenomenon of thought insertion, some people with schizophrenia report that some thoughts in their mind are the thoughts of others. See Parrott, "Subjective Misidentification."

also understand, by reasoning, that one and the same infinite, eternal mode (or finite, enduring thing) can be conceived under the attribute of extension or the attribute of thought, as well as that one and the same infinite, eternal mode (or finite, enduring thing) can be conceived under the attribute of thought either as objectively real or as the formally real act of thinking.

One understands these monist conclusions and their necessity: it is, after all, the nature of reason to regard things as necessary (E2p44). But if one understands these conclusions as necessary, it seems one will, when one reaches the conclusions, automatically replace any mistaken notions about what one's own mind and other things are and reconceive of everything in the correct monist way.

Yet I think this is a bit too quick. In the next two subsections, I propose that cognition of the second kind, because it does *not* proceed from an adequate idea of a self-necessitating substance, is less effective than *scientia intuitiva* in bringing about a change in one's conception of one's existence as an understanding mind.

To begin, suppose that you see the force of the demonstrations of Euclid's *Elements* (or even do original, Fields Medal-quality mathematical work). You have a clear and distinct awareness of what you are thinking, you understand a lot of mathematics and know that you are understanding it. You feel joy in understanding the mathematical material. It seems you can have all of this without necessarily understanding anything about what, in all metaphysical rigor, one's own understanding mind *is*.[69]

Granted, reasoning through the *Ethics* is different from reasoning through the *Elements*, as some of its demonstrations do concern the nature and reality of minds. It thus seems harder to suppose that one would not automatically understand one's own thinking mind in terms of the conclusions about minds one has reasoned to. Yet I still think that understanding that some conclusion about the nature and reality of minds follows from accepted definitions and axioms does not *necessarily* prompt one to apply those general conclusions to one's own experienced mind.

Suppose, for example, that through seeing the force of some demonstrations you understand that the following (call it *C*) is a necessary, eternal truth: *a mind's luminous act of understanding an eternal truth and the objectively real eternal truth are one and the same infinite, eternal mode necessarily caused by God conceived under the attribute of thought.* You may be completely certain of *C*, know that you understand *C*, and feel joy in your own power of understanding how this

[69] In both cognition of the second and third kinds, one experiences the power of one's own mind and experiences the joy Spinoza calls *acquiescentia in se ipso* (E4p52). This is not a smug self-satisfaction, but something closer to self-esteem (which is how Curley translates it) or self-contentment (see e.g. Samuel Shirley's translation in Spinoza, *Complete Works*). As I will discuss below, the *acquiescentia in se ipso* associated with *scientia intuitiva* is a special contentment or repose of mind, *acquiescentia mentis* (E5p27). For more discussion of *acquiescentia*, see Giuseppina Totaro, "*Acquiescentia* dans la cinquième partie"; Rutherford, "The Place of *Acquiescentia*"; and Carlisle, "*Acquiescentia*."

deep metaphysical truth necessarily follows from accepted definitions and axioms. But although *what* you understand are truths about the nature and reality of understanding minds, it still seems you could fail to think of your own luminous act of understanding *C* in terms of these understood truths. That is, you may know that you understand the eternal truth *C* without recognizing that insofar as you understand *C*, your own mind *is itself an infinite, eternal mode*.

You have reasoned to general propositions about minds from other general propositions. But while the truths about minds you have reasoned to are in fact true of your particular understanding mind, the *recognition* that they apply to your own mind is an additional cognition that might not come with your understanding of the general truths. Again, you know that you are understanding the propositions; you are aware of yourself as understanding truths about what understanding minds are. It is just that the understood content hasn't hit home, so to speak.

It will likely hit home, though, if you have been thinking a lot about the existence of your own thinking mind. If, for example, you have meditated with Descartes's Meditator and realized that you can know you exist as a thinking thing from your first-personal experience of thinking, then it seems you would, upon reasoning to *C*, recognize that the reality of your own understanding mind is the reality of an infinite, eternal mode.

2.3 A Spinozistic *Cogito*

One can understand fundamental ontology by reasoning from axioms and adequate ideas of properties of things, but such reasoning might not occur alongside any *cogito* intuition. As I just suggested, in the absence of thoughts about one's own existence as a thinker, reasoning through demonstrations to conclusions about basic ontology and the nature of minds might not come with any thoughts about the reality of one's own mind. Here I suggest that *scientia intuitiva* does come with thoughts about the reality of one's own mind: *scientia intuitiva* is a confluence of an intuitive understanding of fundamental ontology proceeding from an "adequate idea of the formal reality of certain attributes of God" (Intuition A) and a *cogito*-like intuitive understanding of one's own existence (Intuition B).

I say "*cogito*-like" because the intuition is not simply the Cartesian *cogito*. The Cartesian *cogito* proceeds from one's experience of the activity thinking to the knowledge that one exists as a thinking thing. But where the Cartesian *cogito* intuition can proceed from one's first-personal experiences of doubting, affirming, denying, willing, understanding, imagining, and any sensations one has of one's body [*Second Meditation* (AT VII 28/CSMK II 18–19)], *scientia intuitiva* proceeds from one's first-personal experience of a *specific* act of thinking: namely,

the intuitive understanding I've called Intuition A. And where the Cartesian *cogito* does not yield knowledge of what exactly one is as a thinking thing (it is not, for example, knowledge of one's own mind as a Cartesian thinking *substance*), *scientia intuitiva* does yield knowledge of what exactly one's mind, insofar as it is understanding, is: namely, an infinite and eternal mode. If, in the Cartesian intuition, one realizes that in order to have the cognitive experiences one is having, one has to exist as a thinking thing, in *scientia intuitiva*, one realizes that in order to have Intuition A, one has to exist as an eternal and infinite mode of God.

In the last subsection, I observed that one could reason to conclusions about minds without thinking of one's own existence as a thinking thing. But why would *intuiting* conclusions about minds be any different? The key lies in the fact that in reasoning, one proceeds from axioms and accepted definitions of substance, mode, and so on, whereas in Intuition A, one proceeds immediately from an apprehension of the one necessary, eternal, infinite substance.

Suppose you have come to understand, from reasoning through the *Ethics*, that infinite, eternal modes are necessarily caused by God to exist, as well as that an infinite, eternal mode of extension, the representation of the infinite, eternal mode of extension, and the understanding of that representation are the same infinite, eternal mode conceived in different ways. You understand that if a mind represents something infinite and eternal, then the formal reality of that mind is also infinite and eternal. You understand that *if* a mind has an adequate idea of God, the one and only infinite, eternal, necessarily existing substance, then that mind exists as an infinite, eternal mode necessarily caused by substance (understood under the attribute of thought). However, you can succeed in reasoning without focusing directly on the idea of the one and only infinite, eternal, necessarily existing substance.

Scientia intuitiva, however, presupposes such focus: it begins from an adequate idea of God that you *know* you have (E2p43). From this starting idea, you intuit that a mind that has an adequate idea of God exists as an infinite, eternal mode of God. The starting idea is one that you *know* your *own mind* has, so it seems you will immediately think of your *own* understanding mind as existing as an infinite, eternal mode. In *scientia intuitiva*, you realize that you are only able to have the intuitive understanding of God and things—an intellectual experience you know you are having—insofar as your own understanding mind exists as an infinite and eternal mode.[70] Spinoza says "we feel and experience that we are eternal [*sentimus experimurque, nos aeternos esse*]" for "the mind feels those things that it conceives in understanding no less than those it has in the memory" (E5p23s). Whenever you reason, you experience the eternity of your understanding mind: your activity of understanding an eternal truth is indeed the activity of an eternal

[70] See E5p31, "the third kind of cognition depends on the mind, as on a formal cause, *insofar as the mind itself is eternal*" (my emphasis).

mind. Yet with reason alone, you might not understand your activity of understanding as such. *Scientia intuitiva* is different. You *are* guaranteed to understand your own experienced activity of understanding as the activity of an eternal mind.[71]

2.4 *Scientia Intuitiva* as Self-Locating Thought

In *scientia intuitiva*, Intuition A comes with a *cogito*-like Intuition B. That is, one intuits that one's own mind, insofar as it has the first-personal experience of Intuition A, exists as an infinite, eternal mode: the intuited ontological conclusions of Intuition A are recognized as true of one's own mind. *Scientia intuitiva* is thus more powerful than reason on two counts. First, in virtue of being Intuition A, it is an understanding of ontology that does not rely on fallible memory, as reasoning through demonstrations concerning ontology might. Second, in virtue of being Intuition B, *scientia intuitiva*, always comes with an immediate understanding of oneself as in the monist ontology. As I sketched in §2.2, reasoning might not be accompanied by thoughts of the reality of one's own particular experienced mind (or, we can add, body).

Scientia intuitiva turns out to be a powerful kind of self-locating thought. Consider first a *physically* self-locating thought. Such a thought links a first-personal experience (e.g. visual sensations) with a non-perspectival conception of a place (e.g. a topographic map of the Sierra Nevada): e.g. one thinks *I am at Lake Lois*. *Scientia intuitiva* is not physically self-locating, but *metaphysically* self-locating, linking one's first-personal experience of understanding to a non-perspectival conception of monist metaphysical structure: one realizes that one's own understanding mind is an infinite, eternal mode necessarily caused by God. Again, one could orient oneself metaphysically by applying conclusions from

[71] In E5p20s, Spinoza indicates that he is pivoting to a discussion of the mind "without relation" to the body; what follows is a discussion of *scientia intuitiva* and the *acquiescentia mentis* and the intellectual love of God that arise from it. I take the language of the mind "without relation" to the body as a clue that *scientia intuitiva* involves an understanding of the reality of one's mind as an understanding thing. E5p20s echoes E2p21s's "form of the idea insofar as this is considered as a mode of thinking *without relation* to the *objectum*" (my emphasis), which, as I suggested in §2.1, is the mind conceived qua activity of thinking and not conceived qua represented content (i.e. the *objectively real body* or *objectively real affections of the body*). So, when Spinoza says that he is turning to discuss the mind "without relation" to the body, I think he means to focus on the mind conceived as a mode of thinking, bracketing what is thought about, the *objectum*. Yet this does not mean that the *objectum* is irrelevant. On the contrary, if what is thought about is enduring and finite, then the activity of thinking will also be enduring and finite, and if what is thought about is eternal and infinite, then the activity of thinking will also be eternal and infinite. When the body is represented as enduring, then the mind is also enduring: "the mind can neither imagine anything, nor recollect past things, except while the body endures" (E5p21). But when the body is represented as something eternal, then the mind is also eternal: "the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal" (E5p23). Cf. *KV* 2.23 (G I 103/C I 141).

reason to one's own case. But *scientia intuitiva*, as the confluence of Intuitions A and B, is necessarily orienting.[72]

Once one realizes that one's mind, insofar as it has Intuition A, is an infinite, eternal mode, one knows that *whenever* one understands something *p*, one's own mind, insofar as it understands *p*, is an infinite, eternal mode necessarily caused by and inhering in God.[73] One also sees that what is understood, the object of one's understanding, is an infinite, eternal mode: the luminous understanding of *p* and *p* are one and the same infinite, eternal mode conceived in different ways within the attribute of thought. And one sees that an adequate idea of a property of extension is *true* of formally real extension: one and the same infinite, eternal mode can be conceived under different attributes, either as the objectively real infinite, eternal mode of extended substance or as the formally real infinite, eternal mode of extended substance.[74] One sees that to understand properties of things is to understand properties (*propria*) of *God*.[75]

One can also conceive of the enduring, finite world differently.[76] One realizes that any enduring, finite body and an eternal, infinite mode of extended substance are one and the same essence conceived as actual, or real, in different ways. One realizes that if one has an adequate idea of a property of a circle, one knows that that property is not just a property of objectively real circles in thought, but also a property of formally real extension (insofar as it is circular), as well as that that property is not just a property of a true and immutable circle, but also a

[72] In E5p36s, Spinoza seems to present *scientia intuitiva* as an inference from the essence of a singular thing, which seems to conflict with E2p40s2's description of it as proceeding from an idea of God: "For although I have shown generally in Part I that all things (and consequently the human mind also) depend on God both for their essence and their existence, nevertheless, that demonstration, though legitimate and put beyond all chance of doubt, still does not affect our mind as much as when this is inferred from the very essence of any singular thing which we say depends on God." The text is not especially clear, but we need not read Spinoza as offering a conflicting gloss of *scientia intuitiva*. Rather, Spinoza can be taken as making a point about the general proposition *all things (and consequently the human mind also) depend on God both for their essence and their existence*. If one reasons to it, one may not apply it to one's own case. But if one has cognition of the third kind, one has already understood *oneself* as an eternal, infinite mode depending on God. One can, in this case, understand the general proposition as a generalization from one's own particular case (rather than simply one general proposition following from other general propositions); because the general proposition is already recognized as true of oneself, it will affect the mind more (cf. Descartes's observation that the general proposition *everything which thinks is, or exists* can be formed on the basis of the individual first-person *cogito* intuition [*Second Replies* (AT VII 140–1/CSMK II 100–1)].

[73] The general proposition *whenever one understands something p, the mind is an infinite and eternal mode* is already known to be true of one's own mind, and so will affect the mind more than if this general proposition had been inferred from other general propositions. See note 72 above.

[74] See E5p22–3. [75] See E5p24–5; cf. *TTP* 4 (G III 60/C II 128).

[76] In various propositions (e.g. E5p25–8, E5p38), Spinoza talks of knowing *things* (or *more* things) by cognition of the third kind. Interpretations according to which *scientia intuitiva* is an apprehension of individuating essences can accommodate this language this way: one instance of *scientia intuitiva* yields an adequate idea of essence *a*, while another instance yields an adequate idea of essence *b*. On my reading, *scientia intuitiva* is in every instance the same core insight. Yet one can have this same core insight in different contexts, and thus come to situate different things within the monist framework.

property of the familiar enduring extended world (insofar as it is circular).[77] If one feels one's own enduring, finite body to be affected by another enduring, finite body, then one knows that any adequate ideas of properties of bodies one has will be true of one's own enduring, finite body as well *this* or *that* body that one feels affected by.[78]

But most importantly, *scientia intuitiva* necessarily comes with a radical reassessment of the very being or reality of *this* or *that* thing. One realizes that things that one had hitherto taken to be *really real*—one's own enduring body and the many other enduring bodies one feels affected by (E2a4)—aren't real at all; the formal reality of enduring things is not formal reality that can be conceived as in and caused by an infinite, eternal God.[79] Given this realization, one's responses to one's feelings of one's enduring, finite body being affected by other enduring, finite bodies will surely be tempered.[80]

In addition to such mitigation of the affects, finding oneself in God brings its own distinctive joy: one "passes to the greatest human perfection, and consequently (E3 Def. Aff. 2) is affected with the greatest joy, accompanied (by E2p43) by the idea of oneself and one's virtue" (E5p27d). In cognition of the third kind, one does not merely feel joy because one knows that one understands some content perfectly or because one knows that whatever one understands is an infinite, eternal mode: one also feels joy because one simultaneously understands that one's own understanding mind is an infinite, eternal mode of God, a mode of the very act of understanding itself.[81]

The joy is accompanied by an idea of oneself and the idea of God as the cause of oneself (E5p32). There are two ways of characterizing this situation.[82] First, the

[77] I cannot argue for this here, but I hold that Spinoza, like Descartes, holds that the enduring material world can be understood as having geometric properties. Yet Spinoza, unlike Descartes, does not appeal to God's benevolence in an account of why clear and distinct ideas of geometric objects are *true* of the enduring corporeal world (see my "*Scientia intuitiva*" and "Reflective Knowledge"). For recent criticism of the view that Spinoza held that nature could be characterized geometrically, see Schliesser, "Philosophy of Science."

[78] All bodies agree in certain things (L2); if one has an adequate idea of an effect, one can have an adequate idea of the cause; there is "no affection of the body of which we cannot form a clear and distinct [i.e. adequate] concept" (E5p4); and the "mind can bring it about that all the body's affections, or images of things, are related to the idea of God" (E5p14).

[79] See §1.3.

[80] This is not to say that the passions cannot be tempered when things are conceived as enduring and finite. If one understands an affect as a property of one's (enduring, finite) body that has been transitively causally necessitated by the properties of other finite, enduring bodies, one is understanding the affect as necessitated, and insofar as one understands this affect as necessary, the mind is less acted on by it (see E5p6 and E5p6d). It seems one can know that properties necessitate properties and enjoy some mitigation of affects without understanding either that the properties can also be conceived as ways that God's infinite, eternal reality is modified or that things (properties, essences) conceived *sub specie durationis* are not really real. For recent discussion of Spinoza's therapy of the passions, see Alanen, "Affects and Ideas."

[81] See in E2p43s the description of an adequate, true idea as a "mode of thinking, namely, the very act of understanding [*ipsum intelligere*]" (cf. Aquinas, ST Ia, 14, 4).

[82] Cf. Carlisle, "*Acquiescentia*," 227–30 and Totaro, "*Acquiescentia* dans la cinquième partie," 75.

focus can be on the joy as arising from the first-personal experience of cognition of the third kind. So characterized, this is the greatest satisfaction of mind, *acquiescentia mentis* (E5p27).[83] One realizes that one's own first personal experience of understanding is not, as one may have assumed, that of a finite, impermanent mind, but rather that of an infinite, eternal mode, a part of the perfect infinite intellect (see E5p40s). Second, the focus can be on God as the immanent cause of the very being of one's understanding mind. Because God is the cause of the joy one experiences in understanding, God is loved. This love is not the *passion* of love, a joy accompanied by the idea of an *external* cause (E3 Def. Aff. 6). One's intellectual love of God can be completely explained without appealing to anything external to the mind; one's understanding mind is caused by God, but God, as an *immanent* cause, is not an external cause. Unlike ordinary love, this love is eternal (E5p33): one's mind, insofar as it understands something, is eternal, as is God.[84] And unlike ordinary love, reciprocation is a given. One's understanding is (part of) God's self-understanding, so "the mind's intellectual love of God is part of the infinite love by which God loves himself" (E5p36); it follows that "God's love of men and the mind's intellectual love of God are one and the same" (E5p36c).[85]

3. Conclusion: Obedience, Reason, and *Scientia Intuitiva*

In the *TTP*, the distinction between the two varieties of adequate cognition, cognition of the second and third kinds, that is, reason and intuition is not emphasized: in the *TTP*, the more important distinction is between adequate cognition (what he simply calls "reason" in the *TTP*) and inadequate cognition (e.g. imagination, opinion, or testimony, or what he calls "cognition of the first kind" in the *Ethics*). This rougher distinction helps track the difference between philosophy and theology.[86] "Philosophy" works from a non-anthropomorphic, adequate conception of God as a cause of eternal truths to be understood, while "theology" relies on (what the philosopher would deem) an anthropomorphic, inadequate idea of God as a sovereign who establishes laws to be obeyed.

Spinoza would allow that by reason, understood in the sense of adequate cognition that is not *scientia intuitiva*, as discussed in the *Ethics*, one can

[83] Spinoza also uses the term '*acquiescentia animi*' for this satisfaction in E5p36s and E5p42s.

[84] There is nothing that can take away this timelessly eternal love (E5p37): eternal truths are unlike finite, enduring things in that their formal reality is *infinite*, something whose formal reality cannot be limited by anything else. Intellectual love is not an *everlasting* love, a feeling that lasts through time.

[85] For recent discussion of the intellectual love of God in Spinoza, see Nadler, "Intellectual Love" and Primus, "Part V."

[86] A main argument of the *TTP* is that as described, theology and philosophy are independent, each working within their own domain (*TTP* 15 [G III 184/C II 277]). For more discussion, see Garber, "Reason and Revelation."

understand—perhaps by reasoning through the demonstrations of the *Ethics*—that God is not a God to be *obeyed* (or disobeyed) (see *TTP* 16, ADN 34 [G III 264/C II 292]). Once one understands God as the philosopher does, one ceases obeying commandments and begins acting through understanding; if one had previously loved one's neighbor as oneself through obedience to the God of theology, one now loves one's neighbor as oneself through understanding and a love of, rather than obedience to, the God of philosophy (*TTP* 19 [G III 229/C II 333]).[87]

Above I proposed how reason, while still adequate cognition, falls short of *scientia intuitiva*. *Reasoning* to an understanding of the God of philosophy and that God's relation to minds and bodies is compatible with a specific kind of inattention: a merely reasoning philosopher understands (and knows that she understands) that insofar as a human mind has an adequate idea, it is an eternal mode of God, but she may understand (and know that she understands) this without necessarily conceiving of her own experienced activity of understanding in the monist metaphysical terms.

I think we are now in a better position to see what exactly changes when a person goes from (a) thinking of God and things as a theologian to (b) understanding God and things as a *reasoning* philosopher (i.e. along Spinozist lines) to (c) understanding God and things through *scientia intuitiva*. Going from (a) to (b) is transformative, but (b) is perhaps not as far from (a) as we may have assumed.

Consider the person at stage (b). On the one hand, once she has reasoned through the demonstrations of the *Ethics*, she understands, and *knows* that she understands, what God and things are. She had previously thought of God and things along theological lines, but now she knows that that theological picture is false: she now has an explicit understanding of God and things that is inconsistent with the theologian's ideas that God is a lawgiving God to be obeyed. Importantly, the theological picture presupposes distance between the agency of God (God commands) and the agency of human beings (human beings obey). She now has an explicit understanding of metaphysics that is incompatible with this general theological presupposition.

But on the other hand, the reasoning philosopher's luminous understanding of metaphysics does not necessarily come with the luminous understanding of her own activity of understanding. She knows the theologian's general picture of the human mind's agency is false, but she may not have reconceived her own

[87] Whether one conceives oneself (or one's neighbor) as eternally real in God or as something finite and enduring in time, one still understands the relevant eternal truth and still loves one's neighbor as oneself; we can think that this eternal truth—like an eternal truth of geometry—concerns properties that are the same whether we conceive of a thing as eternal or not. See E5p41: "even if we did not know that our mind is eternal, we would still regard as of the first importance morality, religion, and absolutely all the things we have shown (in Part IV) to be related to tenacity and nobility."

experienced activity of understanding. Specifically, she may *lack* the explicit understanding of her *own* activity as *not* distinct from God's activity of understanding.

Note that it seems that *obeying* God comes with some awareness of oneself as an agent. In "carrying out a command solely on the authority of the person who commands it" [*TTP* 5 (G III 74/C II 144)], it seems one has to aware of one's own activity: to count as *obeying*—and thus to count as deserving of reward—one has to be aware of what one is doing. And it seems that in obeying God, one is aware of one's own activity as distinct from God's activity: one is taking oneself to be acting in conformity with *someone else's* (God's) commandment. The reasoning philosopher, in her theologically minded days, thought of her own activity as distinct from God's. But so long as she lacks an understanding of her own mind as part of God's intellect, she lacks the understanding that allows her to know that her previous way of thinking about her own mind—i.e. as something whose activity is distinct from God's activity—is false.

Neither the merely reasoning philosopher nor the philosopher with *scientia intuitiva* can rest in old theological ways of thinking about God and things: they both have adequate, true ideas about metaphysics that rule out those ways of thinking. But the merely reasoning philosopher is, we can see, closer to the theologian along an important dimension: the theologian takes herself to be a distinct agent from God; the merely reasoning philosopher might not understand herself to *not* be a distinct (rational) agent from God. The philosopher with *scientia intuitiva*, however, has the explicit self-understanding that enables her to see that her own activity of understanding p and God's activity of understanding p are *not* two distinct minds understanding the same content, but rather the very same intellect understanding the same content.

Whatever the *acquiescentia animi* and salvation afforded by obeying the God of theology is, it does not involve an awareness of any one-and-the-sameness of one's own experiences and God's experiences. Again, it seems obeying requires that there not be a conception of such one-and-the-sameness. We can thus see how the *acquiescentia animi* and salvation afforded by *scientia intuitiva* is special: it does involve the understanding that there is no distance between one's own understanding mind and God's intellect. With *scientia intuitiva*, one does have the explicit understanding that one's own understanding mind just is part of God's own eternal intellect.

But the philosopher with *scientia intuitiva* might not just have the explicit understanding that her own activity of understanding p and God's activity of understanding p are the very same intellect understanding the same content: this would need more defense, but she might also understand that *any other human mind's* experienced activity of understanding p and God's activity of understanding p are the same intellect understanding the same content. As I mentioned above, the philosopher will *love her neighbor as herself*. "The good which

everyone who seeks virtue wants for themselves, they also desire for other people; and this Desire is greater as their knowledge of God is greater" (E4p37). When she has *scientia intuitiva*, she might realize that others' virtue, or their power of understanding, is *literally* the same as her own: loving neighbors *just is* loving oneself, and this *just is* loving God.[88]

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15
How to Make a Philosopher

Julie R. Klein

1. Introduction

In Annotation 2 of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, attached to chapter 1 and written in his own hand, Spinoza contrasts prophets and philosophers. Prophets, he observes, do not generate prophets, but philosophers generate philosophers:

> If those who listen to prophets become prophets in the same way as those who listen to philosophers become philosophers, a prophet would not then be an interpreter of divine decrees, since his hearers would be relying not on the testimony and authority of the prophet, but on the revelation itself and internal testimony just as the prophet does. [*TTP* 1, ADN 2 (G III 251/C II 77n4)][1]

The opening Chapters of the *TTP* inform us that prophets communicate chiefly in images and commands, and the instructions they issue amount to authoritative hearsay. Whatever we hear, we hear in virtue of an experience only the prophet has. We cannot share it and so have neither "revelation itself" nor "internal testimony." Listening to prophets' images and instructions, no matter how powerfully they are delivered, does not produce a prophetic capacity in the recipient. Listening to philosophers works quite differently. Something about it engenders or activates philosophical capacity, such that those "who listen to philosophers become philosophers." Where the prophet's listeners must passively await the next message, the philosopher's listeners become able to think for themselves. Thus Annotation 2 suggests that, like citizens and nations, philosophers are generally made, not born, though Spinoza does not immediately specify the means of production.[2] In the present chapter, I treat the means of producing philosophers under the heading "pedagogy."

If we look more deeply in the *TTP*, and if we set the *TTP* in dialogue with the *Ethics*, we can find considerable evidence about Spinoza's way of enabling at least some readers to become, at least to some degree, properly philosophical.[3]

[1] I quote but occasionally modify Curley's English translations.

[2] See *TP* 5 (G III 295/C II 529); *TTP* 3 (G III 47/C II 114); and *TTP* 17 (G III 217/C II 317).

[3] Additional material on the theme of pedagogy is found in Spinoza's *TIE* and some of the letters, particularly Ep 9, Spinoza to de Vries, March 1663 (G IV 42–6/C I 193–6). I have discussed these texts in my "Philosophizing Historically."

According to the *Ethics*, all human minds are composed of a ratio or proportion of adequate and inadequate ideas (E3p1, E5p4s, E5p20s). We can read the *Ethics* not merely as a discussion of shifting the proportion in favor of adequacy, but also as facilitating that shift in receptive readers. We can, in other words, read the *Ethics* for what it does, not just for what it says, and so direct our attention to what the incipient philosopher must hear and do. The same hermeneutic of philosophical training applies in reading the *TTP*. In Jacqueline Lagrée's evocative phrase, the *TTP* speaks "*ad captum vulgi aut philosophi*."[4] To be sure, the *TTP* is chiefly about how to produce citizens who, although they themselves do not become rational and philosophical, nevertheless live under the guidance of reason and thereby more cooperatively and peacefully. Along these lines, the *TTP* is mainly concerned with ascertaining the meaning of Scripture, not understanding truth. But the *TTP* also considers the process of becoming rational and reflects on what it means to know and love intellectually, rather than merely obey and imaginatively love, God. Like the *Ethics*, the *TTP* presents intellectual understanding as the paramount form of *salus*, and portions of chapters 4, 6, and 7 embed what might be called a 'mini-*Ethics*' in the text. Just as the demonstrative architecture of the *Ethics* provides extensive practice in reasoning according to the order of necessity and efficient causation, so too Spinoza's meticulous account of the science of Scripture in *TTP* 7 shows how to proceed from reading Scripture imaginatively to understanding its meaning rationally.[5] As will become clear below, Spinozan *cognitio* is dynamic. Spinoza is concerned with ways of knowing, not just with the kinds or content of knowledge obtained.

The *TTP* is distinctively useful with regard to Spinozan pedagogy because it considers exemplary teachers to whom we can compare Spinoza. The principal model is Christ, whom Spinoza presents in Socinian fashion as the consummate teacher.[6] In contrast to Moses, who legislated for the ancient Hebrews but did not teach, Isaiah, who taught only moral lessons, and Solomon, the philosopher of the Hebrew Bible who wrote but did not teach, Christ was sent to teach "the whole human race" [*TTP* 4 (G III 64/C II 133)]. Christ's lessons concerned the "peace of mind and true blessedness of each person [*animi tranquillitatem et veram uniuscujusque beatitudinem*]" [*TTP* 5 (G III 70/C II 140)].[7] With appropri-

[4] Lagrée, *Le débat*, 159. Cf. *TIE* 17 (G II 10/C I 12).

[5] Savan, "Scientist and Theorist."

[6] The same image appears on the title page of Spinoza's early, unpublished *Korte Verhandeling*, which invokes "the Lord Christ our best teacher [*Heer Christus, onzen besten Leermeester*]." Although Spinoza may not have written the subtitle that contains this phrase, it resonates with the *TTP*.

[7] Spinoza's presentation of Christ's knowledge and teaching is complex and justly debated. The touchstone remains Matheron, *Le Christ*, which carefully presents the interpretive challenges. Readers who view Christ in intellectual terms emphasize texts in the *TTP* and the related Ep 73 [Spinoza to Oldenburg, December 1, 1675 (G IV 306–9/C II 467–8)], Ep 75 [Spinoza to Oldenburg, January 1, 1676 (G IV 311–16/C II 470–3)], and Ep 78 [Spinoza to Oldenburg, February 7, 1676 (G IV 326–9/C II 480–2)]. Other key texts include *KV* I.9, which labels the mode of understanding that depends immediately on God the "Son of God" [G I 48/C I 92], and E4p68s, which calls the "spirit of Christ [*spiritus Christi*]" the "idea of God [*idea Dei*]." In the *Ethics*, the "*idea Dei*" is God's "infinite intellect,"

ate provisos to distance us from traditional religious discourses, we can say that "God's wisdom, that is, a Wisdom surpassing human wisdom, assumed a human nature in Christ, and that Christ was the way to *salus*" [*TTP* 1 (G III 21/C II 84)].[8] What was the nature of Christ's pedagogy? Spinoza tells us that Christ spoke to the full range of human beings in virtue of having "a mind accommodated to the opinions and teachings universal to the human race, i.e., to common and true notions" [*TTP* 4 (G III 64/C II 133)].[9] To audiences organized by imagination, Christ taught ethical lessons *more prophetico* through images and parables, and he assumed the manner of a sovereign, issuing laws "because of the people's ignorance and stubbornness" [*TTP* 4 (G III 64/C II 133)]. To more rational audiences, Christ "taught things as eternal truths and did not prescribe them as laws" [*TTP* 4 (G III 64/C II 133)]. On Spinoza's unusual, sometimes perverse, reading, the Apostle Paul is a philosopher. He teaches that blessedness consists in perceiving "God's laws as eternal truths" [*TTP* 4 (G III 65/C II 134)].[10] The rest of Christ's Apostles are likewise mainly moral teachers, not prophets, in *TTP* 11. Their methods were largely rational, though their premises were derived from what they had seen and heard and what they had received as scriptural revelation, not from intellectual knowledge [*TTP* 11 (G III 155–7/C I 244–6)].[11]

which apprehends the "attributes of God and his affections" (E2p4d; see also E1p16, E1p30). Recent intellectualist readers include Melamed, "Spinoza, Jesus"; Fraenkel, "Content of the Bible"; and Frankel, "Liberal Theology." For the opposite view, that Christ is merely an exceptional prophet, not a philosopher or intuitive knower at all, see Donagan, "Spinoza's Theology." Van Cauter, "Lights Untamable" considers the merits of both positions and argues that Spinoza's presentation of Christ is irreducibly double. Although van Cauter does not draw this conclusion, his analysis suggests that Spinoza thinks there is no direct, deductive, route from intellectual knowledge to moral and political instruction. For an approach to Christ's rationality quite different from the studies just mentioned, see Levene, *Spinoza's Revelation*.

[8] As in *Ethics* 5, Spinoza deftly exploits the various meanings of *salus* in this passage. Where the conventionally religious reader understands *salus* as salvation, the careful reader of the *TTP* will notice that Spinoza uses *salus* primarily in terms of socio-political well-being.

[9] Spinoza does not explain Christ's ability "to accommodate himself to the mentality of the people" [*TTP* 4 (G III 64/C II 133)], and it is difficult to explain how a fully intuitive knower would communicate intuitive knowledge either imaginatively or via common notions, that is, according to the second kind of knowing. Rather than imputing some remarkable power to Christ, Spinoza seems more to accentuate that different audiences heard Christ in different registers. The various authors of the biblical Christ stories report what they heard. Spinoza's argument in *TTP* 17 that what the ancient Hebrews experienced imaginatively as theocracy can be rationally understood as democracy provides a clear example of multiple perspectives on an event.

[10] See also *TTP* 11 (G III 157–8/C II 246–7) and Spinoza's remarks about Paul in Ep 73 [Spinoza to Oldenburg, December 1, 1675 (G IV 307a/C II 467)] and Ep 78 [Spinoza to Oldenburg, February 7, 1676 (G IV 328–9a/C II 481)]. Importantly, *TTP* 11 discusses Paul's limitations as a philosopher. Spinoza recalls Paul's foundational doctrines of salvation *sola fides* and predestination, and praises James's rejection of them, calling James's teaching of justification by works "the whole doctrine of religion." In a detailed study of Spinoza's view of the Apostles, Lærke, "TTP XI" argues that Paul exemplifies what the opening of *TTP* 15 calls being crazy with reason (*cum ratione delirare*) (G III 180/C II 272) and originates a superstitious form of theologico-metaphysics.

[11] Spinoza's statement that the Apostles were "able to infer and extract" suggests at least a quasi-rational process; Spinoza's emphasis on what they had seen and heard and received as revelation echoes the description of the first kind of knowledge in E2p40s2. That the Apostles disagreed and built religion on different foundations and that they preferred to teach the "completely uneducated"

There is of course an inescapable and important difference between Christ and Spinoza as knowers. Spinoza's Christ knows only intuitively, whereas Spinoza nowhere presents himself as a fully or exclusively intuitive knower.[12] As readers, then, we cannot identify with Christ, but perhaps, with appropriate historical provisos—we are not seventeenth-century citizens of the Dutch Republic, nor, we hope, are we the equivalents of the ancient Hebrews, right out of the desert—we can take Spinoza as a model in sense invoked in the Preface to *Ethics* 4 [E4pref (G II 208/C I 545)]. Spinoza's famous claim that Christ communicated with God "*de mente ad mentem*" refers to the immediacy of Christ's knowledge and explains why Spinoza thinks Christ's voice "can be called the voice of God" [*TTP* 1 (G III 21/C II 84)]. *TTP* 4 calls Christ "not so much a prophet as the mouth of God" [*TTP* 4 (G III 64/C II 133)] and re-emphasizes the unmediated character of Christ's knowledge:

> From the fact that God revealed himself immediately to Christ, or to his mind, and not, as he did to the Prophets, through words or images, we can understand nothing but that Christ perceived truly, or understood the things revealed [*Christus res revelatas vere percepit sive intellexit*]. For a thing is understood when it is perceived with a pure mind, without words or images [*tum enim res intelligitur, cum ipsa pure mente extra verba et imagines percipitur*]. Christ, therefore, perceived the things truly and adequately. [*TTP* 4 (G III 64/C II 133)]

Spinoza's point is not that Christ's immediate communication is unique. On the contrary, he affirms that "God can communicate himself immediately to men, for he communicates his essence to our minds without using any corporeal means" [*TTP* 1 (G III 20/C II 84)]. E2p47 expresses the same idea in the claim that "The human Mind has adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence." Nor is Christ's true and adequate perception unique, for human knowers achieve it in some measure. Christ's uniqueness lies rather in his "pure mind" [*TTP* 4 (G III 64/C II 133)], which exempts him from the work of emending imaginative ideas in pursuit of true knowledge. Christ is not "born ignorant of the causes of things" [E1app (G II 78/C I 440)] and therefore subject to obstructive prejudices and the affects that sustain them. Moreover, Christ need not, as human knowers must,

rather than those who had begun to learn languages, sciences, and most especially mathematics is a sign of the limits of their discourse [*TTP* 11 (G III 157/C II 246)]. See also *TTP* 12 (G III 164/C II 254). The key point is that imaginative premises are not a stable or durable source of agreement. In the *Ethics*, see E4p32–E4p35, where Spinoza shows the close relationship of imagination to disagreement and contention and the connection between reason and agreement.

[12] After the stylized autobiography of the opening of the *TIE*, Spinoza says little about the degree to which he experienced intuition. The *TIE* tells us that Spinoza turned his own mind "toward the eternal and infinite" for "intervals" that at first "were rare and lasted a very brief time" and eventually became "more frequent and longer" [*TIE* 11 (G II 7–8/C I 10)].

grasp the common notions as way to move from imagining God toward knowing God [*TTP* 6, ADN 6 (G III 252–3/C II 156n7), E2p38–E2p46].[13]

The difference in intuition notwithstanding, both Christ and Spinoza employ "common and true notions" for philosophical teaching.[14] As *TTP* 14 informs us, "the foundations of Philosophy are common notions" (G III 179/C II 270). In what follows, I connect Spinoza's presentation of the common notions in the *TTP* with what he says about them in the *Ethics*. Both texts present them as human knowers' path to knowledge of God. In §2, "Reading for Pedagogy," I sketch the strategy of reading the *TTP* and *Ethics* for insight into Spinoza's pedagogy and establish that both works identify intellectual knowledge and its affects as the best human life. §3 takes up the claim, just seen in *TTP* 1 and E2p47, that the human mind has knowledge of the essence of God. In particular, I consider Spinoza's analysis of why we lack immediate, or what I shall call "active," access to the *idea dei*. Throughout his oeuvre, Spinoza underscores the labor of overcoming prejudice and emending ideas. It is a central theme in the Appendix to *Ethics* 1 (G II 77/C I 439), and Spinoza notes in E2p40s1 that some notions "are clear and distinct only to those who have no prejudices" (G II 120/C I 476). Spinoza's theory of imagination and his awareness of the limits of reason explains how the adequate *idea dei* can be inaccessible or, so to speak, occluded. §4 shows how the common notions can provide at least some rational, if not intuitive, access. In the *TTP*, Spinoza worries about the inefficacy of writing only for the learned [*TTP* 5 (G III 77/C II 148)]. We can look to the *Ethics* to see how Spinoza cultivates increasingly clear thinking and note how ideas are accessible only with appropriate cultivation. I argue that the common notions are best understood as the generative, dynamic principles of reasoning and that, depending on where we are in the process of becoming philosophical, different notions are common to us. The most frequently discussed common notions in the secondary are motion and rest, but both the *Ethics* and the *TTP* suggest that there are common notions proper to

[13] Thus, the Christ of the *TTP* resembles the effortless knower hypothesized in the *TIE* 44, where Spinoza suggests that someone could be so constituted by nature that "everything would flow to him of its own accord" (G II 17/C I 21). This fortunate knower's mind would effortlessly exhibit the causal order of nature, experience union with the first cause, and experience eternal joy or love in virtue of having the *idea dei*. The very existence of the *TIE*, however, confirms that most of us need what Spinoza calls "a deliberate plan" to reach the *idea dei* and realize its implications "as quickly as possible" (G II 17/C I 21).

[14] As Étienne Balibar has noted, "common" is an equivocal term in Spinoza, applying both to "common prejudices" (e.g. *TTP* 11 [G III 118/C II 192]); imaginative phenomena such as the laws, practices, and shared images that constitute a *communis societas*; and to the common notions that constitute reason. See Balibar, "Three Gods," 38–9. In the present chapter, I focus on more narrowly cognitive issues and so leave aside consideration of the earliest stages of transitioning from imagining to reasoning. Hence, I do not address Christ's moral teaching, which Spinoza considers the chief part of Christ's teaching [*TTP* 11 (G III 156/C II 245)], or its political implications. Other commentators, among them Balibar, Gilles Deleuze, Moira Gatens, Susan James, and Hasana Sharp, have examined the imaginative experiences and formations that can sustain the development of reason. I also simply presume our access to initial common notions in the mind rather than explore Spinoza's account of it.

various discourses. In considering how we acquire knowledge of God, I add "being determined and determining others" on the basis of E2p31d and, more radically, "existence," on the basis of E1p8s2. §5 is a brief conclusion. In proceeding this way, I hope to contribute to the literature on Spinoza's depiction of Christ and to the literature on the common notions in Spinoza's epistemology.[15]

2. Reading for Pedagogy

Conceived pedagogically, the *Ethics* turns on how we can move from imagining, characterized by inadequate ideas and passive affects, to reasoning and intuitive understanding, which consist of adequate ideas and active affects. The coupling of ideas and affects points to the two dimensions of Spinozan pedagogy: the production of correctly ordered desire and constructive affect, and the cultivation of the student's power of understanding causal connections. The successful Spinozan student is enabled to displace the authority (both external and internalized) of previously acquired prejudices (literally, *prae-judicia*, pre-judgments) that obstruct or even forbid reasoning [E1app; *TTP* 5 (G III 81–2/C II 152–3)] and to develop a patient practice of reconsidering imaginative, i.e. confused, ideas or "conclusions without premises" (E2p28d), in order to connect them in adequate inferential patterns. The Appendix to *Ethics* 1 is a concentrated expression of Spinoza's recurrent critique of the *ur*-prejudice, the anthropomorphic depiction of God in finalist and sovereign terms. In the grip of this *ur*-prejudice, one who wishes to "understand natural things, not wonder at them, like a fool" is "denounced as impious heretic" (G II 81/C I 443).[16] Diminishing the power of this prejudice and its progeny is the first step in becoming philosophical, for only by releasing their hold can we "be led to the true knowledge of things"

[15] To my knowledge, Michael LeBuffe is the only other commentator to identify determination as a common notion via E2p31dem; see LeBuffe, *Spinoza on Reason*, 87. Deleuze, *L'expression*, 252–67 emphasis on common notions and other adequate ideas as expressive of God's essence in my view makes a similar point; see also the entry on common notions in Deleuze, *Practical Philosophy*. It would be odd, to say the least, if Spinoza's common notions, which are the very medium of reasoning, were merely "mute pictures on a panel" [E2p49s (G II 132/C I 486)]. In addition to the works by Savan, LeBuffe, and Deleuze already mentioned, other helpful studies of the common notions include Gueroult, *Spinoza II*, 326–69; Curley, "Notes (II)"; Schliesser, "Angels and Philosophers." Since Leo Strauss's interpretation of the *TTP* is frequently (and justly) criticized, it bears mention that he urged Savan to focus on the role of the common notions in the *Ethics*. Jeffrey Bernstein found a letter to this effect in the Leo Strauss Archive Box 4, Folder 17, at the University of Chicago and called it to my attention. Whether Savan's paper reflects Strauss's advice we cannot say.

[16] Spinoza's continuous critique of theological-metaphysical anthropomorphism, particularly the ideas of freedom and teleology, testifies to its tenacious power. Even though they are passively acquired, imaginative ideas produce effects, sometimes in ways that that are difficult to alter or undo. E3app, cap. 38 concisely summarizes the power of imaginative ideas: "Whatever man imagines he cannot do, he necessarily imagines; and he is so disposed by this imagination that he really cannot do what he imagines he cannot do. For so long as he imagines that he cannot do this or that, he is not determined to do it, and consequently it is impossible for him to do it" (G II 198/C I 537).

[E1app (G II 80/C I 442)]. It is, moreover, a first step that must be repeated. Even after the overtly heretical metaphysical arguments of *Ethics* 1, and even for readers who have already been asked to demonstrate for themselves that extension is an attribute of God (E2p2), the idea that the Mind is "nothing but" the idea of an actually existing body is a sticking point. E2p11s asks curious but troubled readers to suspend their resistance and cultivate patience: "continue on with me slowly, step by step, and to make no judgment on these matters until they have thought them through."

By working through demonstrations and the often less formal arguments found in the scholia, appendices, and prefaces, the Spinozan student increases her inferential power. She comes to understand "the agreements, disagreements, and oppositions of things" (E2p29s), attends more closely to the causal network of nature, and begins to see things in relation to the first cause. In a word, she shifts from thinking in terms of images to thinking in terms of causal relations. At the same time, her affect becomes more joyful and her ability to persevere in existing and, most important, to flourish increases. With appropriate training and cultivation, then, a human mind at first constituted preponderantly by imaginative ideas and passivity can become a mind in which rational ideas and activity predominate (E5p4s, 5p20s). This development, in turn, can lead to a desire for *scientia intuitiva* (E5p28), in which she apprehends singular things as immanent expressions of the first cause. Since Spinoza identifies adequate ideas, particularly those known according to the third kind of knowledge, and active affects, such as rational and intellectual love, with the best life, the question of how and to what extent it is possible for human knowers to experience the world in terms of adequate ideas is of no small importance. *Ethics* 3 and 4 articulate the stakes of this question in socio-political terms. E5p36s names the stakes "*salus sive beatitudo sive libertas*."

The *TTP* is similarly directed to readers whose power of reason can be mobilized and whose affects can be changed. Speaking to the "Philosophical Reader," Spinoza offers the book as assistance to those "who would philosophize more freely if they weren't prevented by this one thought: that reason ought to be the handmaid of theology" [*TTP* Preface (G III 12/C II 75)].[17] For readers who need only freedom from this prejudice, Spinoza exudes confidence: "I'm confident that this work will be extremely useful." Readers whose liberation requires greater labor, or might even be beyond reach, due to obstinacy and judgmental impulses,

[17] Writing to Henry Oldenburg, Spinoza calls "the prejudices of the theologians" "the greatest obstacle to being's being able to apply their minds to philosophy" [Ep 30, Spinoza to Oldenburg, October 1, 1665 (G IV 166/C II 14)]. In *TTP* 8, Spinoza wonders aloud about whether his attempt to "remove the common prejudices of Theology" will fail: "Things have nearly reached the point where men do not allow themselves to be corrected…but stubbornly defend what they have embraced [*amplexi*] under the guise of religion. Nor does any place seem to be left for reason, except among a very few" [*TTP* 8 (G III 118/C II 193)].

should, in contrast, close the book (*TTP* Preface [G III 12/C II 75]).[18] Spinoza both defends the freedom to philosophize and models it. Spinoza's demystification of theologico-political images he regards as obstacles to human flourishing, most prominently and repeatedly the image of God as a sovereign prince and legislator, displaces the prejudice and puts a critical sensibility and analytical tools in its place. Spinoza's analyses of prophets and prophecy, divine law and rituals, election, and miracles model the transition from common opinions and conventional teaching to a rational reconstruction of the meaning of Scripture. Spinoza himself instructs us that "the method of interpreting Scripture does not differ at all from the method of interpreting nature, but agrees with it completely" [*TTP* 7 (G III 98/C II 171)].

Ultimately, the *TTP* argues that "our supreme good must consist in the perfection of the intellect," for which we require knowledge of God: "because nothing can either be or be conceived without God, and because we can doubt everything so long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God, all our knowledge, and the certainty which really removes all doubt, depends only on the knowledge of God" [*TTP* 4 (G III 59/C II 128)]. It follows, then, that "our supreme good and perfection depend only on the knowledge of God" [*TTP* 4 (G III 59/C II 128)]. As in the *Ethics*, true knowledge of God brings about an affective transformation. Where common opinions are linked with hope and fear, knowledge of God produces love, happiness, and blessedness. In language strongly reminiscent of *Ethics* 5, *TTP* 4 calls *amor dei* "man's highest happiness [*foelicitas*] and blessedness [*beatitudo*]" (G III 60/C II 128). The path to this intuitive knowledge and happiness is properly rational, and depends on the common notions: "Faith in historical narratives, no matter how certain that faith may be, cannot give us any knowledge of God. So it also cannot give us the love of God. For love of God arises from knowledge of him, and knowledge of God must be drawn from common notions certain and known through themselves" [*TTP* 4 (G III 61/C II 129)].[19] As in the *Ethics*, freedom is consequent upon true knowledge, in this case freedom from a servile relation to imaginative representations of the laws of nature. The difference between understanding and imagining distinguishes natural divine law from prophetic law. The former is "universal or common to all men" and aims "only at the supreme good, i.e. true knowledge and love of God" (TTP 4 G III 59/C II 127); the latter relies on images of sovereignty and produces the non-rational goods of devotion and

[18] The reception history of the *TTP* shows that many readers Spinoza would have regarded as unsuitable did not put aside the book and had exactly the reactions he feared. For details, see Nadler, *Forged in Hell* and Israel, "Foreshadowing." Ep 44 [Spinoza to Jelles, February 17, 1671 (G IV 227–9/C II 390–2)] shows that Spinoza took the minimal precaution of asking Jarig Jelles to prevent the printing of a Dutch translation of the *TTP*.

[19] E5p28 sounds the same theme: "The Striving, or Desire, to know things by the third kind of knowledge cannot arise from the first kind of knowledge, but can indeed arise from the second." While I cannot discuss the transition from the second to the third kind of knowing in the present chapter, it's important to note that E5p28 makes no promise that acquiring the second kind leads inevitably to the third kind.

obedience. Spinozan faith is of course not nothing; while the practice of justice and loving-kindness is not knowledge, it is extremely valuable, even essential, for self-preservation.

TTP 5 extols the power of teaching and learning via deductions from "intellectual axioms known through themselves," "i.e. solely by the power of the intellect and its order in perceiving" [*TTP* 5 (G III 77/C II 147)]. But Spinoza holds that only a few people will have the ability and temperament for deductive knowledge: "Because deducing a thing solely from intellectual notions very often requires a long chain of perceptions, plus extreme caution, mental perceptiveness, and restraint—all of which are rarely found in men—men would rather be taught by experience than deduce all their perceptions from a few axioms and connect them together" [*TTP* 5 (G III 77/C II 148)].[20] While someone who follows a prophet's direction may live according to the guidance of reason and so practice "*iustitia et charitas*," the person who actually perceives God's existence intellectually and affirms justice and charity rationally is more blessed, for "in addition to having true opinions, he has a clear and distinct conception" [*TTP* 5 (G III 78/C II 149)]. These themes recur forcefully in *TTP* 13:

> Someone may say: indeed, it's not necessary to understand God's attributes, but it's quite necessary to believe in them, simply, without any demonstration. But anyone who says this is talking nonsense. Invisible things, and those which are the objects only of the mind, can't be seen by any other eyes than by demonstrations. Someone who doesn't have demonstrations doesn't see anything at all in these things. If they repeat something they've heard about them, it no more touches or shows their mind than do the words of a Parrot or an automaton, which speaks without a mind or without meaning. [*TTP* 13 (G III 170/C II 260–1)]

The *TTP* is many things, not least of all an invitation to philosophize. Like the *Ethics*, it is vitally concerned with demonstrations as the eyes of the mind (E5p23s).[21]

3. The *Idea Dei* and the Human Mind

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza explicitly acknowledges that "the human mind is part of the infinite intellect of God" (E2p11c). E5p40s recalls this passage, explaining after the many refinements and clarifications of Part 5 that "it is clear that our Mind, insofar as it understands, is an eternal mode of thinking, which is determined by

[20] E3p2s suggests that even demonstrative arguments may need experiential confirmation (G II 142/C I 494).

[21] Jacqueline Lagrée and Pierre-François Moreau trace the metaphor of demonstrations as the "eyes of the mind" to the Jewish Averroist Leone Hebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore*, which Spinoza owned (see O III 760, n. 13).

another eternal mode of thinking, and this again by another, and so on, to infinity; so that together, they all constitute God's eternal and infinite intellect." A Spinozan intellect is not a faculty (E2p48s) or a static body of knowledge. Rather it is an activity expressing God's infinite power.[22] In this section, I consider Spinoza's claim that the human mind knows God. E2p47 expresses it concisely: "The human Mind has adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence." Spinoza's demonstration appeals to the way that all actually existing finite modes express God's infinite power under some attribute. For us, of course, thought and extension are the accessible attributes. Because the human mind has ideas of actually existing things—itself, its body, and external bodies—it has the idea of God as the cause of those things "under the attribute of which the things are modes." I shall have more to say about the demonstration and about the path from adequately knowing the common notions to adequately knowing of God in §4 below. For now, let us note that E2p47 points to the core relationship of being and knowing: all singular things are expressions of God's infinite power, and all ideas of singular things must be related to the idea of God (E1p15–16). From a philosophical standpoint, "*Omnes ideae, quatenus ad Deum referuntur, verae sunt*" (E2p32). There are "no inadequate or confused ideas except insofar as they are related to the singular mind of someone (see p24 and p28)" (E2p36d). Whether we understand or are confused, then, hinges on what our ideas are related to. To what, then, are our ideas related, initially and after philosophical training?

E2p47s provides some answers. The scholium quickly clarifies that while the proposition "God's infinite essence and his eternity are known to all" is, as all rational claims are, generally true, many concretely existing human beings actually do not have what we can call 'active access' to it. By 'active access,' I mean the abilities consequent upon becoming rational and intuitive and being conscious of these abilities. Spinoza writes:

> But that men do not have so clear a knowledge of God as they do of the common notions comes from the fact that they cannot imagine God, as they can bodies, and that they have joined the name God to the images of things which they are used to seeing. Men can hardly avoid this, because they are continually affected by bodies. [E2p47s]

Spinoza suggests here that it is easier to use the common notions to acquire knowledge of bodies than to acquire knowledge of God because the former is congruent with our ordinary imaginative experience. More important, our perpetual exposure to being affected by bodies means that our minds can be predominantly occupied by imaginative ideas, even to the point of halting the

[22] The same holds for causal activity: "If God, insofar as he is affected by an idea that is adequate in someone's mind, is the cause of an effect, that same mind is the effect's adequate cause (by 2p11c)" (E3p1d).

activity of reasoning and obscuring or ignoring the *idea dei*. When that happens, although we have an adequate idea of God, we do not know that we have it. The scholium vividly depicts the difference between, on the one hand, people so mired in imagination that they are unable to articulate "what they have in Mind" (E2p47s), and the philosopher—here Spinoza himself, writing in the first person—who can. Spinoza hears a man in the grip of imagination "cry out that his courtyard had flown into his neighbor's hen" (E2p47s) and recognizes a verbal gaffe about a situation that is nonetheless perfectly clear. The implication is that the speaker's mind registered the actual events, but this register was obscured by imaginative speech. Similarly, people who make erroneous calculations have one set of numbers in mind and another on the paper in front of them. If we persist in speech rather than understanding, in reading what is on the paper to the detriment of attending to what is the mind, verbal "controversies" are the least of our difficulties. We can well find ourselves in socio-political contradictions and disagreements, which threaten our power to persevere in existing.[23]

Spinoza's framing remarks in E2p47s recall E1p8s2, which explains why the infinity of substance is hard to understand, and E2p10s, which repeats the explanation. E1p8s2 describes the confusion that attends those who "have not been accustomed to know things through their first causes" and "fictitiously ascribe to substances the beginning which they see that natural things have." Were these thinkers able to proceed intellectually rather than imaginatively, none could doubt the necessary, infinite existence of substance established in E1p8. E2p10s targets the same error, criticizing thinkers who "did not observe the [proper] order of Philosophizing" and sought knowledge of God on the model of knowing finite things. When these confused would-be philosophers "contemplated natural things, they thought of nothing less than of the divine nature" [E2p10s (G II 93–4/C I 455)].[24] To borrow one of Spinoza's pithy expressions from E1app, this confused approach "turns nature completely upside down," considering what is really a cause "as an effect, and conversely" (G II 80/C I 442). The upside-down procedure produces ignorance, fiction, and self-contradiction where *scientia* should be. These deficient ways of thinking in turn anchor prejudice and superstition, with invidious political as well as epistemological consequences.

[23] When human beings live under the guidance of imagination, they "can disagree in nature insofar as they are torn by affects which are passions" (E3p33). They are, Spinoza explains, "often drawn in different directions (by E4p33) and are contrary to one another (by E4p34)," even "while they require one another's aid" (E4p37s2). Cf. *TTP* 16: "By the laws of appetite, everyone is drawn in different directions" (G III 191/C II 285).

[24] E1p11s makes a related point in differentiating "things that come to be from external causes" from "substances, that (by p6) can be produced by no external cause." *TTP* 1 describes how the ancient Israelites invented an image for God, despite being prohibited from doing so: "since they had not seen the image of God, they could not make an image which would resemble God, but only one which would resemble some other created thing they had seen. So when they worshipped God through that image, they would think, not about God, but about the thing the image resembled. In the end they would bestow on that thing the honor and worship due to God" (G III 19/C II 82).

The imaginative theologico-politics of divine freedom, teleology, and monarchy underwrite suffering and conflict, for individual human beings and for human collectivities.

Like the *Ethics*, the *TTP* clearly asserts that everyone possesses the *idea dei* and notes the obstacles to realizing it. Consider, for example, the way *TTP* 1 presents the human mind as participating in God's nature and presents clear and distinct ideas as divine *dictamina*.[25] As part of a divine intelligible order, the mind has the power to explain natural things and to formulate ways of living:

> since our mind—simply from the fact that it contains God's Nature objectively in itself, and participates in it—has the power to form certain notions which explain the nature of things and teach us how to conduct our lives, we can rightly maintain that the nature of the mind, insofar as it is conceived in this way, is the first cause of divine revelation. For whatever we clearly and distinctly understand, the idea and nature of God dictates to us (as we have just indicated) [*omnia, quae clare et distincte intelligimus, Dei idea (ut modo indicavimus) et natura nobis dictat*], not indeed in words, but in a far more excellent way, which agrees best with the nature of the mind. Anyone who has tasted the certainty of the intellect must have experienced this in himself. [*TTP* 1 (G III 16/C II 78)]

This is not an isolated statement. As we saw above, Spinoza makes the same point just a few pages later: "we clearly understand that God can communicate himself immediately to men, for he communicates his essence to our mind without using any corporeal means" [*TTP* 1 (G III 20/C II 84)]. But do we have active access to the communication? In fact it is difficult to achieve. Spinoza observes in *TTP* 1 that, because "natural knowledge is common to all men (depending as it does on foundations common to all), ordinary people [*vulgus*], who always thirst for things rare and foreign to their nature," spurn it in favor of prophets' pronouncements and miracles [*TTP* 1 (G III 15/C II 77)]. Similarly, Spinoza argues in *TTP* 4 that the philosopher tastes intellectual knowledge and certainty, but the "carnal man" cannot understand the divine law and its highest precepts: "they seem hollow, because he has too meager a knowledge of God, and finds nothing in this highest good to touch or eat, which is what gives him his greatest pleasure" [*TTP* 4 (G III 61/C II 129)].[26] As Spinoza sums up the situation, "to know God and to

[25] Note the echo of the *dictamina rationis* in E4p18s, E4p62, E4p67d, and 5p20d. E4p62 in particular speaks of how the mind "conceives things from the dictate of reason [*ex ratione dictaminis res concipit*]," by which Spinoza means "conceives things through adequate ideas." For discussion, see Rutherford, "Dictates of Reason."

[26] "Meager" seems to transpose "not as clear" from E2p47s into the imagery of eating. The idiom of intellectual taste also figures in Spinoza's positive appraisal of Solomon's philosophical wisdom and ethics. Spinoza's Solomon shows how reason "teaches Ethics and true excellence, after we have acquired knowledge of things and tasted the excellence of knowledge [*scientia*]. So Solomon agrees that the happiness and peace of one who cultivates the natural understanding does not depend on the

love him from true freedom" is beyond most people [*TTP* 4 (G III 62/C II 130)]. Nor are they interested in understanding nature. Most people "don't want to know the causes of natural things" and instead "long to hear only the things they're most ignorant of, which they're most amazed by" [*TTP* 6 (G III 81/C II 153)]. They can "worship God and related all things to his rule and will only by eliminating natural causes" [*TTP* 6 (G III 82/C II 153)], and so they remain "ignorant of the principles of natural things" [*TTP* 6 (G III 83/C II 155)]. Lest a teacher "write only for the learned [*doctis tantum scribet*]," then, it is preferable to proceed "solely by experience" when trying to "teach a doctrine to a whole nation—not to mention the whole human race" [TTP 5 G III 77/C II 148].[27] For this reason, Scripture is addressed chiefly to "the common people, who for the most part have no knowledge of demonstrations, and don't have time for them" [*TTP* 7 (G III 114/C II 188)].

We find the same themes in Spinoza's discussion of Christ in Ep 73 and Ep 75. In the concluding lines of Ep 73, Spinoza had characterized Christian incarnation as unintelligible and analogized to the patently absurd claim that "a circle has assumed the nature of a square" [Ep 73, Spinoza to Oldenburg, December 1, 1675 (G IV 309/C II 468)]. The recipient of the letter, Henry Oldenburg, who saw Spinoza as "well-disposed to Christianity," presumably the Christianities of Collegiants, Quakers, and Mennonites, pressed him in reply to explain explicit biblical statements of the doctrine, such as John 1:14, which affirms that "the word became flesh" [Ep 74, Oldenburg to Spinoza, December 16, 1675 (G IV 310/C II 469–70)].[28] Spinoza's response is uncompromising and accommodationist: only the ignorant believe in incarnation in a literal sense. He writes:

> If you attend to the following things—that Christ did not appear to the Senate, or to Pilate, or to any of the unfaithful, but only to the saints; that God has neither a right hand nor a left, and is not in any place, but is everywhere according to his essence; that matter is everywhere the same; that God does not manifest

rule of fortune (i.e. on God's external aid), but chiefly on his internal excellence (i.e. on God's internal aid), because he preserves himself chiefly by being watchful, by acting, and by planning well" [*TTP* 4 (G III 68/C II 137)]. The taste metaphor might reflect Psalm 34:8, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." Maimonides uses taste as an idiom for knowing in *Guide of the Perplexed* I.20 and I.32. It's also in the Sufi tradition, and it appears, for example, in al-Ghazali, *Deliverance from Error* as an image and analogue for intellectual insight; see Ormsby, "Taste of Truth." For more on how Spinoza thinks the wise and the ignorant eat, see especially E4p45s and E4p63s2. Spinoza's remarks on Adam are also relevant in this regard, as is his disparagement of vegetarianism in E4p37s1.

[27] Moses sought to teach doctrine to a whole nation. Christ and Apostles sought to teach the whole human race.

[28] Later in the correspondence, Spinoza insists that we can take scriptural reports of Christ's passion, death, and burial literally but must understand Christ's resurrection allegorically. Much as the Apostles believed in the resurrection and ascension of Christ's body, Spinoza argues, we cannot. Oldenburg's response is emphatically negative: "In the Gospels the Resurrection of Christ seems to be related as literally as the other things. And the whole Christian Religion and its truth rests on this article of the Resurrection. Take this away, and the mission of Christ Jesus and his heavenly Teaching both collapse" [Ep 79, Oldenburg to Spinoza, February 11, 1676 (G IV 330/C II 483)].

> himself outside the World, in that imaginary space they hypothesize; and finally, that the structure of the human body is kept within its proper limits only by the weight of the air—you will easily see that this appearance of Christ was not unlike that by which God appeared to Abraham, when he saw three men whom he invited to eat with him [Genesis 18: 1–8]. [Ep 75, Spinoza to Oldenburgh, January 1, 1676 (G IV 313a/C II 471–2)]

Like Abraham, who believed that God in the form of three visitors had dined with him, and like the ancient Israelites, who believed that God descended to Mount Sinai and spoke to them out of a fire, the Apostles believed in the resurrection of Christ. All of these believers, however, were convinced by "apparitions, or revelations, accommodated to the grasp and opinions of those men, by which God revealed his mind to them" (G IV 314a/C II 472). That God occupies no particular or special realm, has no determinate features, and is actually everywhere is no obstacle to unsophisticated human knowers. Like the philosophers of E1p8s2 and E2p10s and the confused speakers of E2p47s, so too Abraham, the ancient Israelites, and the Apostles imagined rather than understood God.[29] Spinoza doesn't mention Adam or Moses in this context, but they are perhaps the paradigmatic cases of remaining mired in imaginative ideas of God.[30] The end of the letter is a challenge to Oldenburg:

> Do you believe that when Scripture says that God manifested himself in a Cloud, or that he dwelt in the Tabernacle, and in the Temple, God himself took on the nature of a Cloud, or a Tabernacle, or a Temple? But this is the most Christ said of himself: that he was the temple of God, because, as I said in my letter, God manifested himself most in Christ. To express this more powerfully, John said that the word became flesh. [Ep 75, Spinoza to Oldenburg, January 1, 1676 (G IV 315–16a/C II 473)]

Quite noticeably, Spinoza writes that that John *said* that the word became flesh, not that John understood Christ. John's formula is a vivid and powerful linguistic, i.e. imaginative, representation of a reality that is also intelligible, albeit not

[29] Cf. *TTP* 12: "Everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, has always been the same" [*TTP* 12 (G III 160/C II 249)].

[30] On Adam, see e.g. Ep 19, Spinoza to van Blijenbergh, January 5, 1665 (G IV 86–95/C I 357–61) (especially G IV 92–3/C I 359–60), *TTP* 4 (G III 63/C II 131–2), and E4p68s. On Moses, see e.g. *TTP* 2 (G IV 38–40/C II 103–7) and *TTP* 4 (G III 64/C II 132–3). Spinoza comments in *TTP* 14 that "Though the voice the Israelites heard could not give them any philosophical *or* mathematical certainty about God's existence, still, it was enough to make them wonder at God, insofar as they had previously known him, and to motivate them to obedience. That was the purpose of that manifestation. God did not want to teach the Israelites the absolute attributes of his essence. (He did not reveal any of them at that time.) He wanted to break their stubborn heart and win them over to obedience. So he addressed them with the sound of trumpets, with thunder, and with lightning, not with arguments" (G III 179/C II 270).

accessibly so for John himself. Only Paul, on Spinoza's account, "knew Christ *secundum spiritum*" rather than "*secundem carnem*" [Ep 78, Spinoza to Oldenburg, February 7, 1676 (G IV 328–9a/C II 481)]. For the philosopher, Christ is only spiritual, i.e. something to be understood, not imagined.

Let us consider one final related passage from the *TTP*. In *TTP* 12, Spinoza explicates God's eternal word and covenant as the presence of the *idea dei* in the human mind:

> For both reason itself and the statements of the Prophets and Apostles clearly proclaim that God's eternal word and covenant, and true religion, are inscribed by divine agency in men's hearts, i.e., in the human mind, and that this is the true original text of God, which he himself has stamped with his seal, i.e., with the idea of him, as an image of his divinity [*verum esse Dei syngraphum, quod ipse suo sigillo, nempe sui idea, tanquam imagine suae divinitatis consignavit*]. [G III 158/C II 248]

Chapter 12 argues that superstitious people have venerated paper and ink, Moses smashed tablets, and the writers of the Gospels narrated the same central events four times, but each of these texts is only an image of the "eternal word" and "true original text," the *idea dei* in the human mind. Similarly, to think of the word of God as law or as the decrees of a sovereign or as a prophetic gift is to miss the way it is "common to the whole human race," knowable in natural causes, and to ignore "the natural light common [to all]" [*TTP* 12 (G III 162/C II 252)]. More precisely, it is to imagine what must actually be understood and that in virtue of which we can understand anything at all.[31]

4. From Common Notions to the *Idea Dei*

In §3 above, I argued that while E2p47, "God's infinite essence and his eternity are known to all," is true of human beings generally, both the *Ethics* and the *TTP* indicate that all of the knowers we know about, save Christ, require some preparation to realize or experience to some degree this constitutive power of knowing. Even access to the common notions, "which are clear and distinct only those who have no prejudices," requires some preparation. I shall not analyze this prehistory of reasoning here. In Spinoza's own words, "knowledge of God must be drawn from common notions certain and known through themselves" [*TTP* 4 (G III 61/C II 130)], and so I shall focus on how and in what sense these "foundations of our reason" lead to knowledge of God. Given that God is absolutely

[31] See E1a4, "The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause," and *TTP* ADN 6 (G III 252–3/C II 156) to be discussed below.

unique (E1p14, E2p4), this rational path is a necessary but not sufficient condition for knowledge of God.[32]

TTP 6 elaborates the model of acquiring knowledge of God first seen in *TTP* 4. As we saw above, *TTP* 4 holds that: "Knowledge of God must be drawn from common notions certain and known through themselves" [*TTP* 4 (G III 61/C II 130)]. In *TTP* 6, Spinoza writes that "God's existence is not known through itself" but must rather "necessarily be inferred from notions whose truth is so firm and steady that no power can be or be conceived by which they could be changed" [*TTP* 4 (G III 84/C II 156)]. Only such immutable notions allow us to infer God's existence "beyond any chance of doubt." Were they changeable, "we would doubt their truth, and consequently also doubt our conclusion, viz. God's existence, so that we could never be certain of anything" [*TTP* 4 (G III 84/C II 156)]. Spinoza's emphasis on the need for "firm and steady" notions meshes with his rejection of miracles in *TTP* 6 on account of God's immutability. While Spinoza doesn't at first call these immutable, steadily present notions "common notions," thinking of them as unchangeable or always available and always knowable in the same way, no matter the variations in experience, brings them quite close to the common notions of the *Ethics*. Contemporary readers need not wait long to confirm the association. Spinoza's Annotation 6, prepared for a second edition of the *TTP* that never materialized and attached to *TTP* 6, explicitly reframes the immutable notions as common notions. Spinoza argues that, since we begin with a confused idea of God and therefore doubt everything, including God's existence, we must attend to common notions and then connect them with notions pertaining to God's nature.

Here is the complete text of Annotation 6:

> So long as the idea we have of God himself is not clear and distinct, but confused, we doubt God's existence, and consequently we doubt everything. For just as someone who does not properly know the nature of a triangle does not know that its three angles are equal to two right angles, so one who conceives the divine nature confusedly does not see that it pertains to the nature of God to exist. But for us to be able to conceive God's nature clearly and distinctly, we must attend to certain very simple notions, called common notions, and connect with those pertaining to the divine nature. If we do that, it becomes evident to us: first, that God exists necessarily and is everywhere; next, that whatever we conceive involves in itself the nature of God and is conceived through it; and finally, that everything we conceive adequately is true. But on these matters see the preface of the book entitled *The principles of philosophy demonstrated in a geometric manner* [= *Renati des Cartes Principia philosophiae* (DPP)]. [*TTP* 6, ADN 6 (G III 252–3/C II 156)]

[32] See the chapter by Mogens Lærke in this volume.

The argument is couched in a Cartesian idiom, presumably to appeal to Cartesian readers and to enable them to consult a published work, though it bears mention that Spinoza's commentary on Descartes does not extend to *Principles of Philosophy* I.49 (AT VIIIA 23–4/AT IX.2 46/CSMK I 209), which presents eternal truths and axioms as common notions. Meyer's Preface to *DPP*, the writing of which Spinoza supervised, is moreover profoundly critical of Descartes for proceeding *more analytico* (G I 129/C I 226–7).[33] Be that as it may, we can see that, like the imperfect knowers of E1p8s2, the confused knowers of Annotation 6 cannot "conceive God's nature clearly and distinctly" and need a pathway or process to move from confusion to the clear and distinct knowledge that exhibits what it means to exist and how things are intelligible. Spinoza identifies attending to "to certain very simple notions" as the first step of that process. These simple notions can then be connected to exhibit causal connections and networks. At the end of the process, we are able to see that necessary existence pertains to the divine nature and, as the characteristically Spinozan causal term "involves" suggests, that God's necessary existence is the immanent cause of everything else. In this way, what is not *per se notum* becomes *perspicuum nobis*. Though we begin in confusion, we can become learned. As Spinoza describes the process, clarity can be wrought from confusion by a process of connecting ideas that leads us to metaphysical insight. Unlike imaginative ideas, which are analyzable and in need of re-connection, the *idea dei*, must be apprehended intuitively.

Looking to the *Ethics*, we see a similar pattern. In a series of texts from E2p29s to E2p40s1, Spinoza presents the common notions as the path from confusion to clarity and order. E2p29s, which appears near the end of an intricate, painstaking analysis of imaginative ideas as confused and inadequate, sketches the path. Spinoza introduces the idea of collecting and sorting our imaginative ideas according to "their agreements, differences, and oppositions." He describes this process of organizing ideas as a shift from perceiving our encounters with things as fortuitous or reflective of the "common order of nature" to perceiving them clearly and distinctly. The former is the order of affections received, which Spinoza calls "external determinations"; the latter is the mind's active order of conceiving, which Spinoza calls the mind's "internal determinations." It is a shift, in other words, from passively undergoing nature to actively understanding it. In order to comprehend "agreements, differences, and oppositions," we need to perceive what things have in common, which as Spinoza makes clear, enables them to interact and to join together, and by implication to recognize what they do not have in common, which may simply reflect difference or may signal serious incompatibility. E2p29s thus signals the need for the common notions described in E2p37–40 as the elements, or, to use Spinoza's own expression, "the foundations" of

[33] Another source to consider in connection with the common notions and knowledge of God is Hobbes's *De Cive* XIV.19.

reasoning [E2p40s1 (G II 120/C I 476); *TTP* 14 (G III 179/C II 271)]. Crucially, these foundations are generative, in the sense that adequate ideas produce adequate ideas (E2p40). To keep this productivity in mind, and so to keep sight of reasoning as an activity, not a faculty, it is best to describe the common notions as the generative elements or germs of reason. In reasoning, after all, we do not understand everything at once but experience increasing powers of explanation and comprehension. To become more rational is to become more attuned to the connectedness of nature: to see it more extensively and more clearly.[34] And, as I noted above, Spinoza's dismissal of the idea of mental faculties "as complete fictions" in E2p48s reminds us to think of reasoning as activity.

To see how the common notions function, let us examine Spinoza's demonstration of E2p47 in greater detail, paying particular attention to the texts drawn into the argument as support. For convenience, here is E2p47 again: "The human Mind has adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence." The demonstration is short but relies on a complex network of prior arguments. Spinoza begins by noting that, as he has previously established, the mind has ideas through which it perceives actually existing things (E2p22), including itself (E2p23), its own body (E2p16c1, E2p17), and external bodies. Although Spinoza does not emphasize the point here, it is worth noting that the propositions he cites show the ideas under discussion to be inadequate in us (E2p24–E2p25), though of course all ideas are adequate in God (E2p7c; see also E2p36d). Spinoza's second step in E2p47d is to invoke E2p45 and E2p46 to establish that the ideas adduced at the outset "necessarily involve God's eternal and infinite essence of God" (E2p45), irrespective of whether they are ideas of singular things as parts or wholes (E2p46).

Quite a bit of philosophical work is done by the incorporation of E2p45–6, and it reveals something about how Spinoza uses the common notions. Let us look at E2p45 and its scholium first. The proposition reads: "Each idea of each body, or of each singular thing which actually exists, necessarily involves God's eternal and infinite essence."[35] E2p45d directs us to attend to how "singular things cannot be conceived without God." Indeed, by E2p6, singular things "have God for a cause insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which the things are modes." Once we see that to conceive things is to consider them under an attribute of God, we must then see, as Spinoza invokes E1a4, that we are conceiving them through a cause. We must see, simultaneously, as Spinoza's formulation, "i.e. by E1def6," suggests, that, since any attribute whatsoever of God "expresses eternal and infinite essence," singular things "must involve God's eternal and infinite

[34] In contrast, E2p28d strongly emphasizes the disconnection of imaginative ideas, analogizing them to "conclusions without premises."

[35] I have modified Curley's translation to avoid supplying a definite or indefinite article for *essentia dei*.

essence." In short, when we realize what it means to conceive something under an attribute, the proof is done.

More precisely, as the scholium shows, understanding E2p45 requires seeing that attributes are not merely abstract or static categories, but rather actively express God's essence.[36] Framed in terms of "the very nature of existence" and the "force" of persevering in existence, the scholium asks us to think less about thought and extension insofar as they sponsor distinctive explanatory schemes (thought and extension, according to E2def6), and more about how any and all divine attributes express power. Spinoza's invocation of E1p24c, which sets aside considerations of the essences of singular things in favor of thinking about their "persevering in existing" through God, "to whose nature alone it pertains to exist" underscores this shift in emphasis. Two further helpful, albeit uncited, texts for understanding what Spinoza says here might be E1p19 and E1p20, which enhance our understanding of E1def4 and E1defd6. Although Spinoza does not appeal explicitly to *potentia dei* in E2p45s, he does use *vis*, a close relative of, and sometimes synonym, for *potentia*.[37] Thus the scholium implicitly evokes E1p34, "*Dei potentia est ipsa ipsius essentia*." Here is the full text of E2p45s:

> By existence here I do not understand duration, i.e., existence insofar as it is conceived abstractly, and as a certain species of quantity. For I am speaking of the very nature of existence, which is attributed to singular things because infinitely many things follow from the eternal necessity of God's nature in infinitely many modes (see 1p16). I am speaking, I say, of the very existence of singular things insofar as they are in God. For even if each one is determined by another singular thing to exist in a certain way, still the force by which each one perseveres in existing follows from the eternal necessity of God's nature [*vis tamen quâ unaquaeque in existendo perseverat, ex aeternâ necessitate naturae Dei sequitur*]. Concerning this, see 1p24c. [E2p45s]

In contrast to the abstract formulations of imagination, reason comprehends things as following from God and makes the force of persevering in existing apparent. Where imagination fixes things in terms of duration and divides bodies into discrete quantities, reason sees things as causally related in being determined and determining others. Given that Spinoza defines imagination as the manifestation in the Mind of affections in the body as present (E2p17s), imagination would seem to bear on singular things, such that it initially seems odd to describe imagination as "abstract." What could be more concrete than bodily encounters? Spinoza's point, however, is that imagining extracts singular things from their

[36] See also Ep 80, Tschirnhaus to Spinoza, May 2, 1676 (G IV 331/C II 484); Ep 81, Spinoza to Tschirnhaus, May 5, 1676 (G IV 332/C II 484–5); Ep 82, Tschirnhaus to Spinoza, June 23, 1676 (G IV 333–3/C II 485–6); Ep 83, Spinoza to Tschirnhaus, July 15, 1676 (G IV 334–5/C II 487).

[37] Cf. E4p3, E4p60d, and 5pref (G II 280/C I 596).

constitutive causal networks—this is how we can think of discrete things despite the requirements of E1p28, which precludes isolated, atomistic modes.[38] The abstraction Spinoza rejects is just this extraction, which obscures the force of natural causal dynamics. Reason, which may initially seem "abstract" because it does not "explain the essence of any singular thing" (E2p44c), is less abstract than imagination because it attunes the knower to the necessary expression of causal power.[39]

E2p46 serves to emphasize that the scope of E2p45 is "universal," such that it does not matter whether the singular thing in question is "considered as a part or as a whole" (E2p46d). Framed this way, E2p46 is a more refined expression of what E2p38 established about the common notions, namely that "Those things which are common to all, and which are equally in the part and in the whole, can only be conceived adequately." The concluding lines of the demonstration point us to it:

> So what gives knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence is common to all, and is equally in the whole and in the part. And so (by p38), this knowledge will be adequate, q.e.d.

The effect of denying any difference between wholes and parts is to underscore that all things express nature's causal power. As E2d7 and Spinoza's letter 32 to Oldenburg on November 1665 (G IV 169–76/C II 18–22) indicate, to think of things as wholes is to consider them in terms of their power to act concurrently. To think of thing as parts is to think of them as being acted on and integrated into a subsuming ratio. Since no Spinozan thing can be only acted on—something entirely passive could not persevere in existing but would instead be collapsed by ambient things—common notions are equally in the whole and the part.

Here we arrive at a crucial juncture: If "what gives knowledge of God" is a common notion "common to all," what is or are the common notion(s) that do it? Often commentators explain Spinoza's theory of the common notions in E2p37–E2p40 through its connection to the mini-treatise on physics in *Ethics* 2. Since E2p37 refers to E2L2, since E2p38d proceeds in terms of "something which is common to all bodies," and since E2p39 concerns something "common, and peculiar to, the human Body and certain external bodies by which the human body is usually affected," the connection is quite clear, and so it seems perfectly obvious to identify motion and rest, the common property of all bodies

[38] See Shein, "Spinning Strands."

[39] It's useful to recall that Spinoza evokes E2p45s only once in the remainder of the *Ethics*, in E5p29s. Like E2p45s and like E1p8c2, E5p29s contrasts imaginative ideas of actually existing things, which involve reference to time and place, with rational and intuitive ideas of actually existing things, which "conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine" and to do so "*sub specie aeternitatis*."

mentioned in E2L2, as the common notions pertaining to all bodies.[40] In a less-noticed passage, Spinoza himself points to determination, i.e. being affected and causing effects, as a common feature of all singular things. E2p31, which depends on the infinite regress in causal determination established in E1p28 (and just evoked in E2p45s), calls "being determined by another singular thing to exist and to produce effects in a certain and determinate way" a "common property of singular things." In fact E2L3 articulates E1p28 for bodies, which suggests that we need not stop our explanation of common notions in E2L2. Adding determination to the list of common notions brings the *Ethics*'s presentation into alignment with *TTP* 7, which lists "the things which are most universal and common to the whole of nature, viz., motion and rest, and their laws and rules, which nature always observes and through which it continuously acts" [*TTP* 7 (G III 102/C II 176)]. Determination is the link to nature's continuous activity. Finally, the property of determining and being determined would fit the requirement of being equally in the whole and in the part, for just as there is no thing in Spinozan nature that comes from nothing, so too there is no thing that produces no effects E1p36). If we think of causal determination as a common notion, it seems a short step to thinking about the source of the causal power, and that would lead us to thinking about God. As E2p45s suggests, even if we think about how one thing determines another "to exist in a certain way," and so to have a characteristic manner or identity, thinking about determination leads us to thinking about "the force through which each one perseveres in existing," and so can lead us to "the eternal necessity of God's nature," that is, to existence itself.

If at this point it seems that determination is the most general common notion and so the one that leads to knowledge of God, one passage I have hitherto omitted from consideration, namely the single reference to "common notions" in *Ethics* 1, makes a somewhat different suggestion. In E1p8s2, Spinoza remarks: "But if men would attend to the nature of substance, they would have no doubt of the truth of E1p7. Indeed, this proposition would be an axiom for everyone, and would be numbered among the common notions" (G II 50/C I 413). The "nature" in question is existence: "It pertains to the nature of substance to exist" (E1p7). Spinoza's axiomatic knowers would understand by substance "what is in itself and is conceived through itself" and by modifications "what is in another, those things whose concept is formed from the concept of the thing in which they are"

[40] Spinoza's proof for E2L2 begins by recalling that "all bodies agree in that they involve the concept of one and the same attribute," namely extension, per E2def1. Lærke (this volume) argues that there is both a common notion sense of extension and an intuitive idea of extension as an attribute of God. Where I see determination as the general common notion that leads us to thinking about nature's causal power, Lærke sees a move from the common notion of extension to the intuitive idea of extension that leads to intuitive knowledge of God. Our readings are quite close, but I rely less on the attribute in favor of greater emphasis on forming a rational idea of God's power. Lærke and I concur that the transition from the second kind to the third kind of knowing is a shift in perspective, which he calls a "Gestalt switch." To be sure, this approach will not be satisfactory to idealist readers of Spinoza, but a full discussion of the issue is impossible here.

(G II 50/C I 413). Have these axiomatic knowers taken the step from determination to the immanent source of causal power? In §3 above, I emphasized an earlier passage in this same scholium that explains why E1p7 may not be axiomatic or common: "the demonstration of p7 will be difficult to conceive for all who judge things confusedly, and have not been accustomed to know things through their first causes" (G II 49/C I 413). This earlier passage describes the imaginative starting point of human knowers, whereas the later passage, with its subjunctive construction, describes the desired outcome of philosophical training. It is a kind of promissory note for, or anticipation of, a more learned future perspective.

In one sense, E2p45s represents that more learned perspective. Conceiving the world though "common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things" (E2p40s2) is indeed a philosophical advance. In another sense, E5p36s, which differentiates reason from *scientia intuitiva*, speaks from yet a more learned perspective, namely the power to proceed from "an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [NS: formal] essence of things" (E2p40s2). In E5p36s, Spinoza uses E2p47 to underscore the greater power of the "knowledge of singular things I have called intuitive, or knowledge of the third kind" as compared to the "universal knowledge I have called knowledge of the second kind." Spinoza writes that, "although I have shown generally in Part 1 that all things (and consequently the human Mind also) depend on God both for their essence and their existence, nevertheless, that demonstration, though legitimate and put beyond all chance of doubt, still does not affect our Mind as much as when this is inferred from the very essence of any singular thing which we say depends on God" (E5p36s). Spinoza's emphasis on the distinctive affective power of intuitive knowing does not negate the achievements of reason; indeed, according to E5p28, reason is a necessary, albeit not sufficient condition, for intuition. Yet Spinoza points beyond conceiving God in general terms, that is, beyond determination and existence as common notions and properties, and toward immediate awareness of God's activity in things as they fall under attributes.

5. Conclusion

Thinking about determination as a common notion is clearly grounded in Spinoza's own words in E2p31d. Thinking about "the very nature of existence itself" (E2p45s), such that "it pertains to the nature of substance to exist" (E1p7) and substance is the cause of modes' "persevering in existing" (E1p24c), as a common notion, admittedly one common "only to the learned [*tantum doctis*]" [(*TTP* 5 (G III 77/C II 148)], is a more complex proposal and perhaps a surprising result. But it is made more plausible by thinking about three kinds of human knowledge in developmental terms and as ways of thinking about ordinary natural things

and God or Nature. At different points of cognitive development, "common" has different meanings, or, to put the point another way, the world comes into view in different ways. Spinoza himself admits common notions of varying scope or range. E2p37, for example, establishes the most general case, referring to "what is common to all things," presumably "singular things" since the demonstration is framed in those terms. E2p38 refers to what is common to all bodies, and E2p39 refers to what is common to human bodies and "certain external bodies by which the human body is usually affected."[41] These propositions establish at least and possibly only one (given the grammatically singular construction of E2p37) completely general common notion relevant to all things, and less general common notions relevant to subsets of things, such as bodies as distinct from, say, ideas, and even to specific discourses, such as human sociality or human nutrition. At the most general level, all singular things express "the nature of existence" as they are determined and determine other things. At a very specific level, E3p56s refers to the "common properties of the mind and its affects." The context is a survey of the variety of human affects, which Spinoza describes in E3p56 as species of the three primary affects, or compositions or derivations thereof. If motion, rest, and determination enable us to explain bodies, joy, sadness, and desire enable us to explain human affect: "there are as many species of Joy, Sadness, and Desire, and consequently of each affect composed of these (like vacillation of mind) or derived from them (like Love, Hate, Hope, Fear, etc.), as there are species of objects by which we are affected" (E3p56).

TTP 7 similarly suggests a range of more general and more specific common notions. Just as we understand natural things by identifying their most "universal and common features" and then turning to the "other, less universal things" to produce specific domains of knowledge, such as a science of human affects, so, too, we can study the meaning of Scripture by proceeding from the more general to the more specific. At the most general level, the foundations of Scripture are, like the foundations of reason, "most universal," "eternal," and "useful for all mortals":

> In examining natural things we strive to investigate first the things most universal and common to the whole of nature: motion and rest, and their laws and rules, which nature always observes and through which it continuously acts. From these we proceed gradually to other, less universal things. In the same way, the first thing we must seek from the history of Scripture is what is most

[41] The varying scopes of these common notions invite us to ask about the order in which we acquire common notions. Do we acquire the narrowest notions or the broadest notions first? As Deleuze, *L'expression*, 261–2 observes, it seems most likely that we would begin learning the common notions in the case of our usual affections and only then proceed to more encompassing notions. The order in which we acquire the notions might not, of course, be the order in which we deploy them for explanation.

> universal, what is the basis and foundation of the whole of Scripture, and finally, what all the Prophets commend in it as an eternal teaching, most useful for all mortals. For example, that a unique and omnipotent God exists, who alone is to be worshipped, who cares for all, and who loves above all those who worship him and who love their neighbor as themselves, etc. [*TTP* 7 (G III 102/C II 176)]

Other, less universal principles, which reflect the "various, and indeed, contrary opinions, as well as various prejudices" of the different prophets [*TTP* 2 (G III 35/C II 100)], constitute and explain narrower—in this case, historically specific—communities. We can, for example, analyze ancient Israel in the time of Moses' leadership both in terms of the universal striving to persevere in existing and in terms of the idiosyncratic images, beliefs, and practices bequeathed by Moses as its founding legislator and prophet.

One of Spinoza's most basic arguments in the *TTP* is that Christ, as distinct from Moses, spoke to all human beings, not just the ancient Israelites as they emerged from Egypt, wandered in the desert, and founded a polity. Spinoza clearly acknowledges that some listeners heard Christ speaking *more prophetico*, as a sovereign and legislator, but he emphasizes the universal scope of Christ's teaching, and that universality, spoken in common notions and as eternal truths, can resound *more philosophico*. As we have seen, the *TTP* contains a small number of passages that develop the common notions in ways parallel and complementary to the *Ethics*. In the *Ethics*, speaking for himself, Spinoza teaches *more geometrico*. The common notions, "the foundations of our reason" are the first adequate ideas through which the mind produces the second kind of knowledge and so makes possible knowledge of the third kind. If Spinoza's audience is smaller than Christ's, his teaching method is the same. Writing as a human knower, Spinoza examines our acquisition of knowledge in considerable detail. Because his analyses afford us opportunities to strengthen our reason, Spinoza offers us less a picture or an abstract theory of human cognition than a generative practice of becoming philosophical.[42]

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[42] I thank participants in the Princeton Conference that gave rise to this volume for their comments and questions. Mogens Lærke and Noa Shein also generously read and commented on early versions.

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PART VI
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

16

Will, Sovereignty, and the Self in the *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

Michael A. Rosenthal

1. Introduction

In chapter IV of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*TTP*), Spinoza distinguishes between two kinds of law, one that "depends…on a necessity of nature," the other "on a human decision" [*TTP* 4 (G III 57/C II 125)]. In this chapter, I shall consider the relation of these two kinds of law to each other and to the ground of sovereign authority, which is the divine will in the first case, and the human will in the second. On the face of it this doctrine seems to conflict with key passages concerning the will in both Spinoza's early works and the *Ethics*. Spinoza consistently attacks the idea of a free will as an error and blames many of our moral failings on the persistent belief in this idea. If the faculty of free will is an error, then so is the belief that the decision we make is possible and could have been otherwise. Yet in the *TTP* he claims that, because we are "completely ignorant of the order and connection of things itself,…for practical purposes it is better, indeed necessary to consider things as possible" [*TTP* 4 (G III 58/C II 126)]. In the context this leads to the conclusion that we treat the second kind of law *as if* it resulted from a free decision of the human sovereign. I want to call this second conception the "quasi-free will."

This raises several important issues related to the development of Spinoza's view. Did he hold the same idea concerning the will throughout his works or did it change in some important respects? Is this passage in the *TTP* an anomaly or does it signal a different view of the will? But it also raises some philosophical issues about the different conceptions of the will in Spinoza's system. What is the relation of these two conceptions of will, the one necessitated the other apparently free? What is the function of this distinction in Spinoza's theory?

In what follows I want to argue that, although Spinoza had certainly conceived of both kinds of will before writing the *TTP*, his view that it is a practical necessity to hold the second view is a change that has consequences for his later work, particularly the structure of the *Ethics*. Not only does the quasi-free will influence his political theory, it also changes his theory of action and the ethics that follows from it. Achieving the highest good is no longer simply a matter of using reason

to correct the mistaken notion of the free will and all that follows from it. Instead, we have to recognize that the quasi-free will is itself part of the process of ethical self-improvement.[1]

I shall show that he uses a concept that is explicit in his early works—a "being of reason" [*entia rationis*]—to make sense of the human will, the sovereign will, and the product of those acts, ethical prescriptions and law. The specific imaginative mechanism that is at the heart of the will and its law is analogy, and this explains both how we go wrong in our decisions but also how we might go right. This account is important, even for actors who are mostly led by reason, because it is an inevitable consequence of our finite nature that we are affected by the imagination and the passions. Although the *TTP* seems focused on politics and on contingently held religious and historical narratives, Spinoza's account of the sovereign decisions of the ancient Israelites yields insight into the very mechanisms of the ethical subject.

2. The Critique of Free Will

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza first discusses divine will and then human will. In neither case is the will free in the sense that it is indifferent, or could possibly be otherwise. I think that it is fair to say that Spinoza had Descartes's view, or at least a certain reading of that view,[2] in mind throughout. In the *Fourth Meditation*, Descartes writes that "It is only the will, or freedom of choice, which I experience within me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp; so much so that it is above all in virtue of the will that I understand myself to bear in some way the image and likeness of God."[3] From this we can conclude that

[1] I agree with recent analyses of this topic that Spinoza does ultimately base laws of the second on laws of the first. See, for instance, Rutherford, "Conception of Law" and Verbeek, *Will of God*. However, I shall argue that both underestimate the extent to which the imagination can play a positive role in the ethical and political project. While Rutherford, for instance, acknowledges the need for laws based on human decision, he does not fully discuss the place of the imagination in their function. Instead, he focuses on the narrow class of rational dictates that are important in achieving the highest good. If we look at the early work and later parts of the *Ethics*, it does indeed seem that Spinoza is most concerned with how a rational person can overcome his bondage to the imagination and the passions. Yet, in the *TTP*, Spinoza discovered the necessity of understanding those very mechanisms and what they can achieve.

[2] Descartes's actual position is very complex and has been subject to a long and inconclusive interpretative debate, especially in relation to the doctrine of the "creation of the eternal truths." Some, like David Cunning in his recent book *Descartes*, have argued that, ultimately God acts necessarily, which would make him closer to Spinoza's view. Others, like Harry Frankfurt, in his paper, "Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths," have argued that God's will is contingent. For evidence of this view, see Descartes's letter to Mersenne, 27 May 1630 (AT I:152, CSMK 25). In his paper, "Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths," Edwin Curley has argued for a kind of intermediate position, in which God willed the eternal truths to be necessary. For a helpful summary of this complex debate, see Cunning's *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article, "Descartes' Modal Metaphysics."

[3] Descartes, Med. 4, AT VII 57/CSMK II 40.

even if our will is not identical with that of God, it is *like* that of God in key respects. He says that:

> the will simply consists in our ability to do or not do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, our inclinations are such that we do not feel we are determined by any external force.[4]

It is precisely this idea of freedom based on "indifference" that Spinoza takes aim at in his account. In his discussion of Divine will, Spinoza argues that "The will cannot be called a free cause, but only a necessary one" because it is only a mode of thinking and no thought, even that of an infinite intellect can exist without a cause (E1p32). Spinoza concludes that "God does not produce any effect by freedom of the will" and that all thought follows from the necessity of the divine nature (E1p32c1, c2).

In the scholia following E1p33, Spinoza explains the difference between necessary, contingent, and possible. A thing is necessary, he says, either in light of "its essence and definition or from a given efficient cause." Something is impossible when it involves a contradiction in an essence or there is no external cause that would make something otherwise. A thing is called contingent "only because of "a defect of our knowledge." It means that we don't know whether it is necessary or impossible. From these observations Spinoza concludes, against those who "subject all things to a certain indifferent will of God," that only our ignorance would prevent us from concluding that God has produced all things necessarily and that there could not have been any other way or order.

If we adjust for the fact that humans are not infinite like God but finite beings, the same argument holds for the human will. In Part 2 of the *Ethics*, regarding the human mind, Spinoza is clear that "there is no absolute, or free will, but the mind is determined to will this or that by a cause which is also determined by another, and this again by another, and so to infinity" (E2p48). In the scholium to this proposition he reminds the reader what he has already explained at some length in E1app. First, in the same way, it is demonstrated that "there is in the mind no absolute faculty of understanding, desiring, loving, and the like" (E2p48s). Second, he says that "these and similar faculties are either complete fictions or nothing but metaphysical beings, *or* universals, which we are used to forming from particulars" (E2p48s). In other words, "intellect and will are to this or that idea, or to this or that volition as 'stone-ness' is to this or that stone, or man to Peter or Paul" (E2p48s). He then goes on to demonstrate that these volitions are

[4] Descartes, Med. 4, AT VII 57/CSMK II 40.

nothing beyond the ideas themselves. A volition is an affirmation and this pertains to the very essence of the idea itself. If the will is merely a mode of thinking and not a faculty distinct from the intellect, then "[t]he will and the intellect are one and the same thing" (E2p49c).[5] Finally, just as he did in the case of divine will, Spinoza points out that contingency is not a metaphysical feature of the human will, but rather a product of the imagination (E2p44c). It is only to the extent that we are ignorant of the nature and order of things that we consider some future state of affairs as possible.

Spinoza had already made many of the same points earlier. Although the *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione* (*TIE*) provides some important material that would later serve as the basis of the critique of the will, it does not have too much about it per se.[6] Spinoza discusses the will more extensively in the *KV*, especially in Part 2, chapter 16, "Of the Will." First, he explains why people typically believe that the will is expressed in the form of indifference, the power to affirm or deny.[7] He immediately calls this supposed indifference into question:

> The question now is whether this affirmation of ours happens freely or by necessity, i.e., whether we affirm or deny something of a thing without any external cause compelling us to do so .... So it must also follow that the particular willing this or that, the particular affirming or denying this or that of a thing, must proceed from some external cause; and the definition we have given of a cause is that it cannot be free. [*KV* II.16 (G I 81/C I 122)]

And then he explains how it is the mechanism of a "being of reason" that leads to the reification of the particular volitions that we experience:

> In doing this, they consider the *Being of Reason* not as what it is, but as *a Real Being*. For because man has now this, now that Volition, he forms in his soul a universal mode which he calls the Will, just as he forms the Idea of man from

[5] Like Descartes, Spinoza distinguishes between the faculty of Will and that of Desire. The former involves affirming and denying; the latter "the desire by which the mind wants a thing or avoids it" (E2p48s). See the discussion in *KV* II, 17, where Spinoza makes the distinction between will and desire but only after he has made "clear that we have no Will to affirm or to deny" [*KV* II.17 (G I 85/C I 126)].

[6] There is a particularly interesting passage, in which Spinoza apparently attacks the Cartesian notion that the soul is free: "Evidently, they say that…the soul can, by its own force alone, create sensations or ideas, which are not of things; so they consider it, to some extent, as like God" [*TIE* 60 (G II 23/C I 27)]. The immediate context of the discussion is the epistemology of fictions: "Next, they say that we, or our soul, has such a freedom that it compels us, or itself indeed its own freedom. For after it has feigned something, and offered its assent to it, it cannot think or feign it in any other way, and is also compelled by that fiction…" [*TIE* 60 (G II 23/C I 28)].

[7] "Desire, we have said, is that inclination which the Soul has toward something it considers good. From this it follows that before our Desire extends to something, a decision has already taken place in us that such a thing is good. This affirmation, then, or taken generally, the power of affirming and denying, is called the Will" [*KV* II.16 (G I 80/C I 121)].

> this and that man. And because he does not sufficiently distinguish real beings from beings of reason, it comes about that he considers the beings of reason as things that are truly in Nature, and thus posits himself as a cause of some things. [*KV* II.16 (G I 82/C I 123)]

From which he concludes:

> …So I think that we have shown that the Will is no thing in Nature, but only a fiction, we do not need to ask whether it is free or not. [*KV* II.16 (G I 83/C I 124)]

True, when he deals with the subject in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* (*CM*), which is appended to his presentation of the Cartesian view in the *Renati des Cartes Principia philosophiae* [*DPP*], Spinoza sounds some oddly Cartesian notes and the evidence is mixed.[8] Still, overall, it seems quite clear that the critique of the will was a central plank of his philosophical system and that key portions of it can be found across his works, from the earliest to the latest.

One of the most striking bits of evidence of this apparent continuity is the fact that Spinoza repeats almost verbatim the comments he makes in chapter II.18 of the *KV* on the advantages of his doctrine in the long and crucial scholium to proposition 49 that ends Part 2 of the *Ethics*. In the *Short Treatise*, he denies that the will is free and then he goes on to list a variety of the "advantages" which follow form this view, including overcoming our pride at being the cause of something and helping us further the common good [*KV* II.18.3 (G I 87/C I 128)].[9] It is a surprisingly passive stance. As he writes, "We see then that because man is a part of the whole of Nature, depends on it, and is governed by it, he can do nothing, of himself, toward his salvation and well-being" [*KV* II.18.1(G I 86–7/C I 127)]. And Spinoza concludes with a rather shocking, though illuminating statement, "it follows from this that we are truly God's servants—indeed, his slaves, and that our greatest perfection is to be such necessarily" [*KV* 18.2 (G I 87/C I 127–8)].

Spinoza provides the same kind of list in the last section of the scholium, which he introduces by saying that "It remains now to indicate how much knowledge of this doctrine is to our advantage in life" [E2p49s [IV] (G II 135/C I 490)] and then continues with a very similar list. The message seems to be that the key to

[8] In one place, for instance, he says that the reconciliation of God's predestination and our free will "surpasses human understanding" [*CM* I, 3 (G I 243/C I 309)]. This is even more surprising since in Spinoza's preceding presentation of Descartes's view, he claims it follows as a corollary from the proposition that "God is an entirely simple being" that "God's intellect and his will, *or* his Decree [*Decretum*], are only distinguished by reason from his essence" [*DPP* Ip17 and p17c (G I 177/C I 260)].

[9] Other benefits: (2) we do not pride ourselves on our achievements; (3) we don't hate our fellow man but rather are inclined to help him; (4) this knowledge serves to further the common good; (5) it frees us from sadness, despair, envy, etc.; (6) we do not fear God as some fear the Devil, which they have feigned; (7) we attribute everything to God and love him alone.

his ethical project involves correcting the false idea of the free will, which then leads more or less directly to improve our well-being personally and socially.[10]

3. The Account in the *TTP*

That is why it is surprising to find an apparently different evaluation in the fourth chapter of the *TTP*, in the context of the discussion of the law. A law is when an individual or a member of a species "acts in one and the same fixed and determinate way." Spinoza then distinguishes between two kinds of law. The first is one that depends on "a necessity of nature"; the second depends on a "human decision [*ab hominum placito*]" [*TTP* 4 (G III 57/C II 125)]. An instance of the former is the universal law that describes the impact of bodies on one another. An instance of the latter is a case of "legislation." Whereas the former is necessary, the latter is contingent. Although a human decision is not the absolute cause of the effect—for ultimately it too depends on the laws of nature—it is the "proximate cause." And, because we are "completely ignorant of the order and connection of things itself,…for practical purposes it is better, indeed necessary to consider things as possible" [*TTP* 4.4 (G III 58/C II 126)].

Although Spinoza uses the Latin phrase "*ab hominum placito*," which Curley translates as depending on a "human decision," rather than "*ex hominum voluntate*," or depending on "human will," there are several reasons why the terms are functionally equivalent. The general use of this phrase in Latin is to signify something that is conventional or made by men for a purpose. For example, Seneca in his letter to Lucilius talks about how any art will have its theories, which the Greeks called "dogma" and the Romans called "theories" or "adopted precepts" [*vel scita vel placita*].[11] In philosophical discussions of semantics in the medieval period, which developed ideas of Aristotle, it was common to talk about how linguistic signs were adopted by human convention in contrast to animal signs, which were presumably determined by nature. Augustine emphasized the "intention to signify" (*voluntas significandi*), while Boethius wrote about how the meaning of a sign was given by the speaker's act of "imposition."[12] Umberto Eco notes the importance of the phrase "*ad placitum*" ("at pleasure") in Boethius to emphasize the role of convention in human speech.[13]

[10] Further evidence of the continuity of Spinoza's view, as Wolfgang Kienzler pointed out to me, can be found in his Ep 58 to Schuller, which is tentatively dated from October 1674 (G IV 265–8/C II 427–9). There Spinoza derides the concept of "absolute" free will and he rejects Schuller's assertion that the conception of freedom based on acting out of necessity undermines virtue. I take it that here he is defending the metaphysical conception and not concerned, as I shall elaborate below, with explaining how the person still partly governed by the imagination can train his mind to act in accordance with the true rational idea of the will.

[11] Seneca, *Epistulae* 3, 65.

[12] See Meier-Oeser, "Semiotics." See also Perler, "Scotus," 99.

[13] Eco, "Latratus Canis," 13–14.

Spinoza picks up on this tradition at several places. In the *Ethics*, he claims that, in contrast to the order of the intellect, the signs of images vary and are the product of memory and convention (see E2p40s1–2 and E2p18s). In the *TIE*, he specifically uses the phrase "*ad placitum*" to describe the first mode of perception: "There is the Perception we have from report or from some conventional sign [*ad placitum*]" [*TIE* 19 (G II 10/C I 12)].[14] And he writes later that, while God does not feign (*fingere*) anything, humans produce fictions that involve "the composition of different confused ideas" (*TIE* 64). Moreover, in the *TIE*, as in beginning of *TTP* 4, Spinoza links the notion of conventional feigning with the modal notion of possibility and thus with the appearance of a will that can decide among alternatives.[15]

Of course, Spinoza rejects the metaphysics of free will in the context of the production of these conventional fictions, but in all of his works he wants to maintain the appearance of the distinction between what appears to us as the necessary order of nature and the order of custom, which is mediated by the individual subject or collection of subjects, and which has multiple possibilities. So, even if conventions are in some sense produced by natural occurrences, there is a meaningful—that is, a practical—sense in which signs and decisions can be related to our activity as the proximate cause, when we join some image with a sign, which we call our "will." In other places in the *TTP*, when he discusses biblical (i.e. imaginative) language, he is clear that the speakers believed a decision to be an act of will, as in his analysis of the meaning of the Hebrew term רוח (*ruagh*).[16]

The ambiguity of the phrase "*ab hominum placito*" in *TTP* 4 suits Spinoza's rhetorical and philosophical purposes not only in the theory of signs but also as it applies to his notion of law. The early modern natural law tradition drew on Aristotle, among others, to distinguish between natural and positive law.[17] Spinoza does not accept the metaphysics of a moral law that is something over and above the laws of nature as a whole.[18] But he does maintain a prima facie distinction between the laws of nature as they apply to all things and those that have their

[14] "Est perceptio, quam ex auditu aut ex aliquo signo, quod vocant ad placitum, habemus."

[15] See *TIE* 52ff and *TTP* 4 (G III 58/C II 126): "for practical purposes it is better, indeed necessary, to consider things as possible." A useful discussion of these issue is found in Miller, "Possibilities." Miller distinguishes between "doxastic" and "metaphysical" conceptions of possibilities, and he explains why Spinoza is committed to the first use while denying the validity of the second.

[16] In the chapter on prophecy, he writes, "And in this sense [*ruagh*] it is used to mean the will [*voluntatem*], *or* decision [*decretum*], the appetite and the impulse of the heart [*appetitum, & impetum animi*], as in Ezekial 1:12…*where there was a Spirit* (*or* a will [*voluntas*]) *to go, they went*" [*TTP* I (G III 22/C II 86)].

[17] Grotius also distinguishes between the "law of nature" and "volitional law." See ch. 1, §9 of Grotius, *War and Peace*, 28. The question of whether law is instituted by intellect or will is also surveyed in book I, ch. 5 of Suárez's *De Legibus*, in Suárez, *Selections*, 58–73. Both Suárez and Grotius think of "laws of nature" as moral laws, while "volitional laws" are positive laws that make, as Hobbes would put it, the internally binding moral laws also externally binding through coercive force.

[18] For a thorough discussion of Spinoza's relation to the natural law tradition of his time, see Matheron, "Spinoza et Grotius."

proximate cause in human nature and require a decree to enact.[19] We may believe that the decision is based on free will, as the sovereign claims, though in fact, because it too is a determinate product of nature, it can be subject to scientific investigation. Yet, even if the reduction of the second kind of law (convention) to the first (natural) is in principle possible, in practice we need to maintain the distinction. The notion of will signifies the belief in the underlying intention behind the sovereign's decree and the resulting convention that it establishes.

Both notions of law depend upon some concept of the will, since all things are defined in terms of their cause. In the case of natural laws, God's will is their cause. Spinoza emphasizes here, as he does later in the critique of miracles in chapter six, that God's infinite will is fixed and determinate and expresses his eternal essence. It follows that the laws of nature will be fixed and determinate as well. In contrast, human will is finite and limited. The legislation that we decree is not everywhere the same but depends on the particular conditions in which we decide them. As I have argued, a human decision is an act of will. The sovereign will in the state seems to be different in an important way from the will of God. It is the cause of the law, but it is not fixed and eternal, though it may want to appear that way. Apparently, in the case of legislation, Spinoza does not think that human decision is simply an illusion to be dispensed with.

There really are three concepts of the will in play in this section. The first is the true idea of the will as an idea governed by a necessary universal law. The second is the naïve and false idea of the free will, which postulates that we are radically free and can act outside of the universal law. The third is the quasi-free will, which imagines that we are free while at the same time knowing that this is only a partial and incomplete (i.e. inadequate) idea that must be subject to constant (and unending) correction by reason.

In the political context, each of these ideas of will plays a role. The second, naïve idea of the free will is ubiquitous. It is certainly present in the simple exercise of sovereign legislation. However, it is hardly ever that straightforward. Spinoza identifies it as an important cause of religious superstition and political tyranny. It is also present as an underlying cause of the most fundamental structures of superstition among subjects as well. In the Preface to the *TTP*, Spinoza explains how superstition takes root among the people and how political leaders can exploit it. There he points to the vacillation between fear and hope as the central cause of religion and the salience of fear as the cause of superstition. This affective predicament is caused at root by our ignorance of the natural laws that

[19] Likewise, if there is a distinct sense in which the sovereign decrees the laws, there is also a sense in which the subject must will to obey it. There is always the possibility that a subject can disobey the sovereign, a possibility that is enshrined in the idea of a natural right. Moreover, he consistently distinguishes between decisions that are coerced and those that are done voluntarily, which he signifies by the use of the words "*voluntate*" or "*sponte*". See, for example, *TTP* 5 (G III 75/C II 145); *TTP* 6 (G III 96/C II 169); *TTP* 16 (G III 195/C II 289); *TTP* 18 (G III 226/C II 329).

govern the world. If we imagine that God governs the world like a human being, then we will fear him (and love and hate him) to the extent that we believe he is radically free, that is, indifferent (in both senses: not caring and capable of acting otherwise) to our fate.[20]

The sovereign will also make frequent use of the divine will. The sovereign who has a naïve concept of will in regard to his own legislation will often refer to divine will in order to justify his own decrees. In this case, the inconstancy of the sovereign is projected onto the Gods as a cause, so that it is "as if the whole of nature were as crazy as they are" [*TTP* Preface (G III 5/C II 66)]. The sovereign uses superstitious beliefs about God to bolster his own power.[21] (There is also another scenario in which the sovereign does not appeal to divine will at all, declaring himself to be a god. This is a kind of madness and perhaps leads to some of the very worst tyrannical excesses, precisely because there is no external check, even symbolic, whatsoever to his arbitrary, and self-justifying, exercise of power.) When the naïvely free sovereign imagines God by analogy to himself, then superstition bolsters tyranny.

The sovereign who has a quasi-free will also recognizes that the appeal to an imaginatively conceived divine authority will help bolster his authority. Yet, because this realization is itself achieved through either some rational ideas or experience that is informed (even if the sovereign does not know it directly) with reason such that it resembles (through analogy) rational dictates, the quasi-free sovereign invokes God indirectly through the use of a true idea of natural law. An example of this mechanism would be the use of the "doctrines of the universal faith" in *TTP* 14, which have been gleaned from Scripture and justified first by long experience and secondly by reason, and whose purpose is to instill obedience through justice and loving-kindness. These doctrines are not true ideas of God meant for the rational philosopher but imaginative ideas that motivate the ordinary person to do the good. The doctrines describe God as a supremely just and merciful being, with dominion over all things, and who judges (rewards and punishes) his subjects.[22] It is in fact a divine model of an earthly sovereign, which serves to justify and regulate the latter.

[20] In the *Ethics*, Spinoza analyzes the vacillation of the mind in E3p17s and says that it is really a species of doubt, and refers to E2p44s, where had had given an analysis of contingency. In E3p9, Spinoza points out that love and hate will be greater toward things if we imagine them as free rather than as necessary. This explains why we love and hate men more than other things. We can easily see that if we anthropomorphize God, then our love and hate, as well as the concomitant fear and hope, will intensify.

[21] "To avoid this evil [of inconstancy], immense zeal is brought to bear to embellish religion—whether the religion is true or illusory—with ceremony and pomp, so that it will be thought to have greater weight than any other influence, and so that everyone will always worship it with the utmost deference. The Turks have succeeded so well at this that they consider it a sacrilege even to debate religion; they fill everyone's judgment with so many prejudices that they leave no room in the mind for sound reason, nor even for doubting" [*TTP* Preface (G III 6–7/C II 68)].

[22] *TTP* 14 (G III 177–8/C II 268–9). See Rosenthal, "Dogmas."

Finally, quasi-free will is a central to the institution of sovereign authority through the mechanism of a social contract. To the extent that individuals are led by naïve free will, they will be mired in the putative state of nature. They will be fearful and unable to predict the actions of others. Interestingly, Spinoza believes that, although we are formally free in the state of nature—there are no coercive laws that govern us—we quickly become aware that this formal freedom is hollow and life in this condition is as if in a desert.[23] So, we act as if we are free, while at the same time using principles that are either directly or indirectly informed by the true laws of nature. An example of such a principle is in fact the crucial one that he invokes to explain how self-interested beings can nonetheless ultimately find a reason to cooperate, the "universal law of human nature that no one neglects to pursue what he judges to be good, unless he hopes for a greater good, or fears a greater harm" etc. [*TTP* 16 (G III 192/C II 285)].

There is thus always an equivocal meaning to the contract. One the one hand, we can understand how it comes into being through reference to the universal laws of nature. On the other hand, it is individuals who must choose to act for these laws to have meaning. It may be, as Curley notes, following Wernham, that, for this very reason, Spinoza came to the conclusion that the language of a contract was meaningless and then later abandoned it in the *TP*.[24] Nonetheless, in the *TTP*, Spinoza maintains the image of an individual choosing to act in accordance with the contract. Spinoza invokes the distinction, no doubt borrowed from that of Hobbes, between a sovereign power established by conquest and one instituted by institution,[25] when he writes that a person will transfer his natural power to another "whether because he's forced to, or voluntarily [*in alterum vel vi, vel sponte transfert*]" [*TTP* 16 (G III 193/C II 287)]. In other words, when he is not forced by some external cause, then the person who is capable of entering into a social contract is a quasi-free agent in the sense we have defined.

4. The Quasi-Free Will in the *Ethics*

As we have just seen, he takes the concept of an absolute, or free, will and shows how it was constructed from particular experiences, a process that reveals that it is not a real entity but a being of reason instead. Once these fictions and beings of reason have been exposed as such, then we are in a position to arrive a new and improved idea under the guidance of reason.

[23] See *TP* 2.15 (G III 281/C II 513): "[I]t follows that as long as human natural right is determined by each person's power, and belongs to that person, there's no human natural right. It consists more in opinion than in fact, since there's no secure way to maintain it."

[24] See Curley's note 9, C II 286. In this way we can understand the remark that "a contract can have no force except by reason of its utility" in *TTP* 16 [(G III 192/C II 286)] as either referring to the law determining the outcome or to the individual calculating under the guidance of the law.

[25] See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 20.

However, in the *TTP* Spinoza has justified the use of a being of reason for practical purposes. As we have seen, he still employs the epistemic critique of the naïve free will as part of his critique of superstition and tyranny. It is not a true metaphysical entity. Yet he also believes that there is a concept of the will—what we have called the quasi-free will—that must be employed. The will is the being of reason that is crucial for action under the conditions of uncertainty. Instead of trying to get rid of it, Spinoza comes to realize, perhaps grudgingly, that it is a practical necessity, first in his politics, and then in his ethics.

Now I want to show that the doctrine of the quasi-free will plays an important role not only in politics but also in what we might call Spinoza's ethical project, broadly speaking, which we find from Parts 3 to 5 in the *Ethics*.

This being of reason functions, as do most imaginative entities, via a series of analogical structures.[26] The first is the generalization of the particular will and the construction of a faculty of willing. This process, we should recall here, is based on four fundamental features of the imagination: (a) an image that is caused when an external thing affects the body and the mind has an idea of it (E2p17); (b) the association through experience and memory of two or more distinct images (E2p18); and (c) the proliferation of similar images that are blurred into a single thing (E2p40s1); and (d) the naming of that conglomeration via a sign (E2p40s2). As we saw above in the first section, Spinoza uses precisely this structure in describing the genesis of the will (see the discussion of *KV* II.16 (G I 82/C I 123)). The primary analogue is the particular will and the fictional faculty stands as the sign that binds the other instances together. Indeed, the positing of the sign is necessary in order to identify the other instances as tokens of a type. The fictional faculty is also analogous to the particular in the sense that it does have the power to cause some effect. We do not speak of innumerable discrete instances of willing, but of "the will" as the causal agent. The fictional faculty of the will "acts" by analogy with the causal action of a particular desire.

The second analogy is to nature itself. It is crucial that the will understands itself as a natural phenomenon in some sense. However, because it is an imaginative construct, the will cannot be an adequate representation of the natural phenomenon it purports to be. Yet because the original idea appears natural so too, again via analogy, does the fictional entity constructed out of these ideas. This is certainly true of the naïve will that believes itself to be a fact of nature and does not, through either simple ignorance or philosophical error, consider otherwise. But it is also true of the quasi-will that knows that it is a construct. The will is effective to the extent that it resembles a natural force. Thus, there is a basic tension in the notion of a quasi-free will: it suspects that it is just a fictional construct,

[26] For a more detailed analysis of the role of analogy in Spinoza's theory of the imagination, see Rosenthal, "Beings of Reason."

yet its efficacy depends on suspending that disbelief so that it can act causally *like* a natural cause.

The third structure is just the analogy to the political function of the sovereign will. The ethical subject takes itself to be like the sovereign in the state. In order to become free in the rational sense we have to be able to employ the imaginative notion of ourselves as a sovereign over our own actions and then ultimately to drop this notion. This is what we shall explore in the following section.

4.1 The Use of the Sovereign Analogy in the *Ethics*

The first and perhaps the most striking analogy is in the *constitution of the individual subject*.[27] Spinoza gives an account of the nature of the finite individual in the so-called "physical digression," which follows the scholium to E2p13. Spinoza rejects the Cartesian notion that our identity consists in an immaterial substance that has been created by God, which he calls the soul. But, if there isn't an immaterial soul, then what constitutes the individual? Spinoza's answer is given in the definition following A2": "when a number of bodies…communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner [*certa quadam ratione communicent*], we shall say that those bodies are united with one another that they all together compose one body or individual" [E2d following a2″ (G II 99–100/C I 460)]. As long as the parts, even if they change, maintain the same *ratio* of motion and rest, then the individual retains its nature [E2lem5 (G II 100–1/C I 461)]. The question, though, is what idea do we have of this *ratio*? If the "object of the idea constituting a human mind is the body" (E2p12), then I would argue that the individual mind is simply the idea of this *ratio* of the body's parts. As he writes in E2p15, "The idea that constitutes the formal being [*esse*] of the human Mind is not simple, but composed of a great many ideas." This formal idea of the *ratio* would be a rational one. However, as Spinoza immediately points out, because finite bodies are always acted upon by external bodies, our idea of ourselves (our "condition" [*constitutionem*]) is mostly mediated by the ideas of those external bodies acting on us. The idea of our body as it has been affected by some external body is what Spinoza calls the "imagination" (E2p17s). This means that although it is possible for us to have a rational idea of our constitution, we mostly form an imaginative idea of it, i.e. one that has been mediated by our relation with external things.

[27] Alexandre Matheron inspired this point. He notes that, in Spinoza's system, finite individuals cannot exist by themselves but exist always as part of a *community* of individuals. He comments: "Mécanisme un peu analogue à celui du pacte social, qui garantit aux citoyens la jouissance de leur droit naturel tout en en limitant l'exercice. Tel est ce qui l'on pourrait appeler le 'contrat existentiel' des essences" (Matheron, *Individu et Communauté*), 20. Matheron also argues that the rules for the constitution of the body in Lemma 5 of the physical digression apply to all individuals in the universe no matter the scale (42).

Spinoza ties the imagination directly to the mistaken and naïve notion of the free will. It is significant, I think, that when Spinoza claims that we know our own body primarily through the effects of external things on us in E2p16c2, he refers the reader back to E1app. There he writes:

> Men think themselves free, because they are conscious of their volitions and their appetite, and do not think, even in their dreams of the causes by which they are disposed to wanting and willing, because they are ignorant of [those causes]. [E1app (G II 78/C I 440)]

So, even as we are affected by external things, which lead us to pursue or avoid them, we imagine instead that we are acting as the cause on them. We see an ad for a car in a lovely setting with a happy, attractive couple in it and we form the desire to buy it. Instead of thinking that the ad caused us to form a desire for the car, we (or some of us at least) imagine that we were free to desire it. Thus, Spinoza argues that the doctrine of the free will reverses the actual order of things, "this doctrine concerning the end turns nature completely upside down. For what is really a cause, it considers as an effect, and conversely" [E1app (G II 80/C I 442)].

When we are ignorant of the causal order, our immediate response, structured by the imagination, is to place the will in as a placeholder for our ignorance. It may be true that a rational idea of the *ratio* of the parts of our body is the formal idea of the self. However, we mostly experience the self as the imaginary idea of the will. It is in fact merely an indirect idea of the self, as it is mediated by the effects of external things on us, but it *appears to us* as the key element of the self.

Here, finally, is the analogy to the sovereign. The sovereign believes that he is the essential cause of the state and expresses its form. However, in fact, he has been formed by the action of the parts of the state, the subjects, who transfer their power to him. He has thus reversed the actual causal order of the political body and expressed that reversal in the false belief that he is the cause of the state. The error is compounded when the subjects believe that the sovereign's will expresses their essence, when in fact it is their collective will that has established the sovereign.

Nonetheless, in both cases, the constitution of the political and of the self, we can conceive of the will not simply as an error to be eliminated but as a practical necessity. Even though a rational idea of the self is possible, we are often too ignorant to arrive at this idea. Hence, we employ the notion of the will, a being of reason, as a placeholder of the self. Here, though, we need to invoke again the distinction between the naïve and the quasi-free will. If we are not aware of our ignorance, we are naïve, and we run the risk of conflating the practical necessity of the will with a putative theoretical truth. In contrast, if we are aware of our own ignorance, then we can employ the idea of the will, or rather the quasi-free will as a practical necessity without claiming that it expresses our essence.

The fact that it is the "will" that serves as the placeholder of our identity rather than some abstract idea of the self is important. We can draw a nice parallel to Descartes's *morale par provision*. In the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes is worried about one possible consequence of his project of radical doubt.[28] Descartes thinks that morality is an applied branch of the sciences and that it too requires a secure foundation. If it is necessary to tear down the existing shaky and deeply problematic edifice of knowledge in order to build one on new and secure foundations, then morality too would be called into doubt. This might have the unfortunate consequence of leading directly or indirectly to our ruin before we have been able to construct the new building. Thus, Descartes argues that it is necessary, when we embark on the path of radical doubt, to maintain a provisional morality, which, even if it is not strictly speaking true, nonetheless, has the practical effect of preserving us while we seek the truth. In this way, we may call the quasi-free will the *provisional* free will. Unlike the naïve free will, we do not mistakenly believe that it expresses the truth about our nature, which requires rational grounding. But it is necessary because if we give up any coherent idea of the self, we would also risk undermining the very conditions under which we can arrive at a true idea of the self. The will reacts to external circumstances by positing a coherent self, which, as we shall see, projects an achieved unity as an image into the future, a goal. The notion of a quasi-free will is primarily a tool for self-preservation.

This leads us to the second use of the analogy, the *legislative*. Just as the sovereign expresses its will through legislation, whose purpose is to increase the well-being of the whole, the individual expresses its will through desire for something that it deems to be good for the continued preservation of the self. It was implicit, as I argued above, in the very idea of the constitution of the self, outlined in Part 2 of the *Ethics*, that we imagine the self as a will, a being of reason abstracted from the myriad interactions with the external world the causes of which we are ignorant, whose task is to preserve the individual. Spinoza makes this explicit in the beginning of Part 3 with the doctrine of the *conatus* or striving. In E3p6, he writes, "Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being." Spinoza demonstrates this proposition in two ways. First, he claims that it follows from determinism, the set of propositions in Part 1 that purport to establish that all things follow necessarily from God. All finite things depend on the infinite, such as the laws of nature, and on the causal chain of which they are necessarily a part. He also, more controversially, tries to argue that it is self-evident that "no thing can be destroyed except through an external cause" (E3p4), and hence that a subject cannot contain things of a contrary nature, such that it

[28] See Part 3 of Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* (AT VI, 22–31/CSMK I 122–6).

would destroy itself" (E3p5). Our purpose here, however, is not to defend the truth of this view but rather to examine its function within the system.

The key point is that the *conatus* doctrine expresses Spinoza's considered idea of the Will. It ties into the prior discussion of the constitution of the self. As he claims, "The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing" (E3p7). In other words, the formal idea of the mind that constitutes the individual is nothing but its striving to persist in its nature, i.e. to maintain the ratio of the motion and rest of the body's parts. Spinoza links this to the will. He writes:

> When this striving is related only to the Mind, it is called Will; but when it is related to the Mind and Body together, it is called Appetite. This Appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation. And so man is determined to do those things. [E3p9s]

The will has several guises. Spinoza points to the complexity of our striving and uses these terms to emphasize different aspects of our nature.

Again, we need to emphasize the difference between the rational concept of *conatus* and how we imagine it. It is true that from the point of view of reason the *conatus* or will is simply part of the determined order of things. If we had a true idea of our striving, then we would know how our actions follow from our natures. However, as Spinoza goes on to demonstrate at the beginning of Part 4, given our finite natures, we cannot but help it that we are constantly affected by external things, which causes us to form inadequate ideas, which we call the imagination, and the passive affects, or the emotions (E4p4). Hence we also experience *conatus* through inadequate ideas as much or even more than adequate ones (E3p9). It is the prelude to his theory of the passive affects, all of which are, cognitively speaking, based upon an inadequate idea of external things acting upon us.

The fact that we experience *conatus* primarily through the imagination has five important consequences, each of which has an analogy with the sovereign.

First, the will imagines itself as a singular cause that unifies the disparate parts. In a sense, of course, this is also the case with the true, rational idea of the will, which is the single *ratio* of the motions and rest of a complex set of parts. The difference is that, to use Spinoza's crucial distinction, while the true idea of the will is *immanent* in the ideas of the disparate parts, the inadequate idea appears to be *transcendent*, over and above the particulars. (This, as we remember from above, is essential to its nature as a being of reason: from a series of discrete volitions we form the idea of an entity that apparently stands ontologically prior to the particulars.)

Second, according to reason, our striving is indefinite (E3p8), but insofar as we experience it through the imagination it will be finite and specific. Like the legislator the inadequately conceived will acts in response to a specific situation, bounded

in time and place. Moreover, because we are ignorant of the precise causes of our actions, we also imagine the acts of will as contingent, depending on its putative freedom to decree, and rooted in our consideration of possible outcomes.

Third, due to the complexity of our nature and only limited grasp of the ways in which external things causally affect us, we will have multiple desires. Hence the vacillation of the mind, as each of these desires strive internally to produce a particular effect over and against, and sometimes in cooperation with others, is expressed in terms of deliberation. It is as if there is an internal assembly considering a law, with each party arguing, cajoling, pressuring, and negotiating with the other. It is the imaginative experience of this internal jostling of desires that comprises at least part of what we think of as deliberation.

Fourth, even though reason tells us that there are no ends or goals, our striving will be imaginatively experienced in terms of goals and purposes. This is due to the fact, as we have seen above, that the imagination reverses the actual order of causes and effects and then posits an independent power over those causal sequences. The mind imagines the cause of our striving as an effect, which it misunderstands not as an external cause but as a free cause. The legislative will imagines itself as the cause of legislation when in fact it responds to demands of the various factions (who are themselves influenced by causes external to them). Yet the outcome of deliberation, or the resolution of internal debate and conflict, is expressed through the notion of a sovereign will deciding to do something. This decision cannot be a mere fact of nature. Rather, it is essential to the will that its decision has a normative dimension that distinguishes it from other possible outcomes. It is good and the other outcomes are bad in relation. In this way, the imaginatively experienced will is almost always linked to normative claims.

Finally, what the will desires it posits as a good that has caused that desire in the first place. Spinoza argues that, according to his rational reconstruction of the will as *conatus*:

> It is clear that we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it. [E3p9s]

However, insofar as we experience the will through the imagination, it does not appear this way at all. Not only do we believe that we act as if for an end, we also claim that we ought to achieve this end because it appears to us as a good. The sovereign will also claims that its goals are good, rather than asserting it has made these objects good because we desire them. Thus, the sovereign will draws upon the analogy with nature to justify its decisions.

If the individual believes that these features of the will as *conatus* are true, then the individual possesses what we have called a naïve idea of the will. At the other extreme, if the individual has an adequate idea of its essence as well as detailed

knowledge of the causal chains in which its finite being is bound, then it will have a determinate idea of the will. In the middle of these extremes stands the quasi-free will, which we have represented through the analogy to politics as an internal sovereign who settles internal disputes through decisions that are justified by analogy to nature, while at the same being aware to some degree, of the artifice of the self-construct.

As we can see in the spectrum of internal states that we could describe as deliberation, the distinction between a naive will, a quasi-free will, and a determined will will not always be so neat. The naïve will does seek to justify itself via knowledge, and to the extent that it does that, it will recognize that it is not absolutely free to act. Unfortunately, since we have all too many examples in politics of how rulers can actually increase their own power through the disregard and even disdain of knowledge, this will be rarer in the ethical context. Nonetheless, the utility of knowledge in our efforts to strive to persist makes it more and more difficult to maintain the stance of a naïve will in the ethical context. If a person guided directly by reason is rare, a person guided indirectly by reason in the form of a quasi-free will will be the norm.

5. Conclusion

Now we have explored two key aspects of the analogy of the self to the polity, the idea of the will as the keystone of the practical constitution of the self under conditions of uncertainty, and the idea of the will as the legislator of what is good for the preservation of the self. There is a further analogy, which is really a corollary to the first two aspects, namely, the practical necessity to posit a model of the self as a guide for action. I must leave this topic for another occasion. However, in conclusion, I want to point out a dis-analogy. In the case of the political Spinoza emphasizes that although a rational idea of the state is possible and can serve as a model, given human nature, it is highly unlikely that it is possible. Some progress and improvement can certainly be made. But we should not make the mistake that human nature could change on a mass scale such that a true democracy, in which rational individuals cooperate without the need of coercive laws, would be realized. In the ethical case, however, it is a guiding assumption of the project that ultimately we should be able to rely less and less on imaginative notions to the point that we can abandon them altogether. There is no analogy to the intellectual love of God and the eternity of mind in politics. While it is true that Spinoza aims to realize at the very end of the *Ethics* the intellectual vision he articulated in the very beginning of the *TIE*, I hope to have shown that through his engagement with politics he substantively modified the nature of the project. It is no longer a matter of emending the intellect through reason, abandoning false and fictive notions, and reaping the benefits. Rather, it is a far more complicated process that

requires that, even as we critique them, we use these imaginative entities for the sake of self-preservation and even gradual improvement.[29]

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Where Is the Collective Morality in Spinoza's *Ethics*?

Connecting Spinoza's *Ethics* to his Political Philosophy

Jonathan Israel

1. Introduction: Linking the *Ethics* to the *TTP*

A striking feature of Part 5 of Spinoza's *Ethics* is that it begins with the distinctly puzzling statement that this final part deals with the "means, or way, that leads to liberty [*quae est de modo, sive via, quae ad Libertatem ducit*]" [E5pref (G II 277/C I 594)]. In his debate with Michael Della Rocca about the coherence, or lack of it, of Spinoza's philosophy, Daniel Garber remarks that "even if there is a central narrative in the *Ethics*, it is by no means entirely clear that the narrative here is the same one essentially as encountered in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* or the *Tractatus politicus*."[1] We face the problem of:

> …how to balance these apparently different narratives, the emphasis on the individual in Part Five of the *Ethics* and the emphasis on politics and the social dimension in Part Four of the *Ethics* and in his political works, the emphasis on becoming more rational in the *Ethics* and the emphasis on religion and biblical testimony in the *TTP* is not evident. Perhaps the historical Spinoza was not as focused and single-minded as we like our superheroes to be.[2]

In what follows, few will be surprised, I shall contend for the essential coherence of Spinoza's principal works.

It follows from the argument of the *Ethics* that an individual can be 'free' in Spinoza's sense under an oppressive regime and 'a slave' in a democracy. Part 4 of the *Ethics* begins by defining 'slavery' (or 'bondage') as "the individual's lack of power to moderate and restrain his emotions" [E4pref (G II 205/C I 543)]. It is here that Spinoza contends that man is inherently part of nature and cannot act

[1] Garber, "Superheroes," 520.

[2] Garber, "Superheroes," 520.

otherwise than in accordance with nature. It is here too that he defines 'good' as "what we certainly know to be useful to us" (E4def1), 'bad' as "what we certainly know prevents us from acquiring some good" (E4def2), and 'virtue' as man's "very essence" (E4def8) in the sense of his power to bring about developments, good or bad, in accordance with his specific nature. Analyzing the working of the human passions, Spinoza lays down the principle that "we call good, or evil, what is useful or harmful to preserving our being" (E4p8d) in the sense of what increases or diminishes our power of acting and ties our individual judgments about good and bad to what brings us 'happiness' or 'sadness'. By our nature all men are attracted or repelled by what they individually consider good or bad, but violent emotion or desire can be stronger than a sound knowledge of good and bad, depending on external circumstances. Our individual passions inevitably produce general disharmony and strife both between men and within the single individual.

Men can agree and live in harmony only insofar as they curb their individual passions through the guidance of reason. Nevertheless, it is also true that "when each man most seeks his own advantage for himself, that men are most useful to one another" (E4p35c2). This is the essence of trade, the source of commercial and other services, and the fundamental reason why Spinoza judges discussion of conflicting interests, and the democratic republic guided by a broad representative assembly, as the best paths simultaneously to the optimal set of conditions for each person to develop their own lives as they wish and to an institutional framework inherently superior to any other kind of regime. It constitutes a key element of Spinoza's doctrine that the force of reason, however imperfect, is always a collective phenomenon not necessarily understood by those who experience or benefit from it. Men are often a nuisance to each other undoubtedly, nevertheless, "from the society of our fellow men," we derive "many more advantages than disadvantages" (E4p35s). Men's desires can be good or bad but by E4p61 "a desire that arises from reason cannot be excessive."

Further, "a man who is guided by reason is more free in a state where he lives according to a common decision, than in solitude where he obeys only himself" (E4p73). This is because the free man understands the value of what Spinoza terms in E4p73d "the common advantage" both for others and himself. It seems eminently clear, then, from the argument of Part 4, that here at any rate, the political *is* directly linked to the ethical in Spinoza's system, and the collective to the individual, and that there is no way that one can circumvent Spinoza's argument bridging the *Ethics* and the *TTP* at this point where he argues that collective reason seeking the "common advantage" is a force for the advancement and benefit of society, one that benefits the free man as well as the majority of mankind unable to grasp the reality of things, that is the *vulgus*, who live by passions and prejudice rather than reason. My object in this essay is to consider the question of

how far this central doctrine expounded at the end of Part 4 of the *Ethics* may be pronounced inconsistent, out of balance, or at odds in any way, with Part 5 of the *Ethics*, on the one hand, and Spinoza's political writings on the other?

Even if the word 'liberty' in Part 5 of the *Ethics* is taken to refer strictly only to individual freedom, and not freedom of a group or collectivity which is not obvious, it is an arresting statement that seems deliberately to link individual morality to the political sphere. Undoubtedly, the *Ethics* as a whole, and certainly Part 5, is concerned mainly with the individual's path to knowledge, freedom and a happy life; but there are various clues and hints here as to how Spinoza's innovative moral philosophy relates to the life of individuals in society, and necessarily has to be since Spinoza has, in practice, abolished Revelation, the reality of divine laws apart from the unalterable laws of Nature, and all divine governance of human communities. Hence, there is no way he can eschew the need to provide foundations for a new, secular moral order that at bottom, if not in appearance, wholly rejects religious authority, institutionalization of confessional differences and support for theological dogmas but yet is robust enough to serve as a durable basis of laws and political institutions. Quite a challenge.

The path to individual freedom in Spinoza is, of course, essentially a matter of learning to use one's reason correctly and forsaking those things most people devote their lives to, as Spinoza himself struggled to do while wrestling with his difficult family and community circumstances during his twenties. "So long as we are not torn by emotions contrary to our nature we have the power of ordering and connecting the inclinations of the body according to the order of the intellect" (E5p10). On the face of it, it seems odd that men can have emotions "*qui nostrae naturae sunt contrarii* [that are contrary to our nature]," but, in striking contrast to Hobbes and Rousseau, nothing is more fundamental to Spinoza's philosophy than the idea that our original natural state, both individually and collectively, is highly imperfect while at the same time in large part indispensable and impossible to wholly escape from. It is simultaneously a profoundly un-Hobbesian and un-Rousseauist context where basic features of our emotional make-up hinder both individual and collectivity from advancing toward true human perfection—that is the exalted level that is undoubtedly extremely distant from the state of nature in Spinoza and yet nevertheless organically inescapably and indispensably tied to it: true liberty is attainable only by what is referred to in E5p10s as "the love of freedom alone" which aims to know the virtues and their causes, and to fill one's mind with the happiness that arises from true knowledge of them.

At the end of this scholium, we learn that the final goal of the ethical maxims, practices, and concerns for the philosophically minded individual, the self-instilling of 'religion' in Spinoza's sense, is to avoid the vices, preoccupy one's own mind with the virtues, and enjoy the happiness these bring. The person on the right path is one "who busies himself to moderate his emotions and appetites"

and does so "*ex solo Libertatis amore* [from the love of Liberty alone]" [E5p10s (G II 289/C I 603)]. *Libertas* is certainly a key ethical term as well as key political concept in Spinoza and it is perhaps especially here that the concerns of the *Ethics* and those of the *TTP* most strikingly converge. In the *TTP*, as in the *Ethics*, our knowledge of the laws of nature and our knowledge of God constitute the *summum bonum*, the highest good, and are the "highest felicity and happiness of man, his final end and the aim of all his actions" [*TTP* 4 (G III 60/SI 60/C II 128)].[3] It is the chief contention of this paper that the deliberate use of the term '*libertas*' at the core of Spinoza's moral philosophy crucially ties the ethical to the political and that nothing could be more unphilosophical than to do what, until now, philosophy professors at universities typically do in this connection—treat the *Ethics* and *TTP* as entirely separate, as if their aims and concerns were in some way totally divergent. For on the contrary, they consistently and mutually buttress each other.

2. Positive versus Negative Liberty

It has often been pointed out, by Quentin Skinner among others, that where Hobbes has a negative conception of liberty, Spinoza has a positive conception.[4] Precisely because Hobbes's liberty requires only protection and internal security, freeing men as far as possible from internecine strife, hatred and conflict, and the fear that goes with such internecine strife, that the political orientation in Hobbes is toward strong monarchy and governance, toward the unimpeded state. Spinoza's case is dramatically different, not just because the historical circumstance that Spinoza was living in the Dutch Republic at a time when De Witt's 'True Freedom' was at its height provided a markedly different context from that troubling Hobbes, but also because Spinoza views the path to human happiness as one that can only be followed by using an active, conscious "love of liberty" [E5p10s (G II 289/C I 603)]—to fight off the vices and bad passions and focus one's critical-analytical intellect on the virtues. Spinoza's "*ex solo Libertatis amore*" [E5p10s (G II 289/C I 603)] hence implies a liberty that is personal, striving, alert to oneself and others, and unimpeded in its capacity for self-criticism and criticism of others. It is a conception of the moral self, and indeed of philosophy as such, inseparably linked to freedom of expression and debate, and freedom of

[3] See Giancotti Boscherini, *Lexicon Spinozanum*, I, 115. Unless otherwise noted, I use Michael Silverthorne's and my translation of Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, cited as "SI" and followed by the page number. I also supply references to Gebhardt's edition in G III and to Curley's translation in C II throughout.

[4] Actually the debate about the "Two Concepts of Liberty," the rival notions of positive and negative liberty, began with a famous lecture delivered by Isaiah Berlin, in Oxford, in 1958, and continued in lively fashion for half a century with Quentin Skinner one of those principally intervening. See Berlin, *Concepts and Categories*, xvi, 246–59; and Palonen, *Quentin Skinner*, 121–2, 125–6, 129–30.

judgment, including political judgment, and the democratizing, republican dimension of Spinoza's political thought, rendering his system of 'atheism' directly contrary to that of Hobbes in many basic respects. In retaining and transferring as much of possible of the individual freedom of the 'state of nature' to his ideal democratic republic, Spinoza indubitably steers closer to Rousseau than Hobbes;[5] but in postulating a hard and lonely path to personal liberty, locating it a vast distance from the state of nature, Spinoza interposes just as great a distance between himself and Rousseau's future stance as between himself and Hobbes.

In a notable passage of the *Leviathan*, chapter 30, Hobbes warns his compatriots against looking enviously at the well-being and prosperity of the neighboring Dutch Republic. The populace must be "taught" that "they ought not to be in love with any forme of Government they see in their neighbor Nations, more than with their own, nor (whatsoever present prosperity they behold in Nations that are otherwise governed than they) to desire change." For, the "prosperity of a People ruled by an Aristocraticall, or Democraticall assembly," held Hobbes, "cometh not from Aristocracy, nor from Democracy, but from the obedience and concord of the Subjects: nor do the people flourish in a Monarchy, because one man has the right to rule them, but because they obey him."[6] There is an important strand of agreement between Hobbes and Spinoza here—it is the effectiveness in performing the state's true purpose, not its organizational form that matters when evaluating a particular state. Yet, nowhere is the basic divergence between Hobbes and Spinoza clearer than in Spinoza's idea that in a properly organized republic the sovereign is society itself, society as a whole wherever based on "reason" and promoting harmony and self-fulfillment among its citizens, leaving each to exercise the natural right to conserve himself as best he can. When obeying the laws, it is everyone's wish, and everyone's right, to advance their own personal quest for happiness, so when the republic defends that interest and right as it should, men are not, in reality, transferring their own "natural right" to anyone but conserving it in a new, more orderly and improved format. When asked by Jelles to pin-point the essential differences between his political theory and that of Hobbes, Spinoza famously replied that Hobbes removes the "natural right" under the state whereas he, Spinoza, preserves it intact and unimpaired [Ep 50, Spinoza to Jelles, June 2, 1674 (G IV 239b/C II 406)]. That indeed captures the point precisely.

"Human society," it appears, despite formal transfer to society of each individual's right, "can therefore be formed without any alienation of natural right, and the contract can be preserved in its entirety with complete fidelity, only if every person transfers all the power they possess to society, and society alone retains

[5] See Vernière, *La pensée française*, 485.

[6] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, vol. 2, ch. 30, 524–5 and N. Malcolm's, *Editorial Introduction*, in Hobbes, *Leviathan*, vol. 1, pp. 23–4.

the supreme natural right over all things, i.e., the supreme power, which all must obey, either of their own free will or through fear of punishment. The right of such a society is called democracy." "Democracy," Spinoza maintains, "is properly defined as a united gathering of people who collectively have the sovereign right to do all that [this pooled, collective right] has the power to do" [*TTP* 16 (G III 193/C II 287/SI 200)]. It is in this respect that it makes sense to claim that where Hobbes cancels the natural right of the citizens, he, Spinoza preserves it in its entirety.

3. Two Kinds of Men: Philosophers and the Masses

Meanwhile, Spinoza further diverges from Hobbes by postulating a daunting distance between those who are 'free' in his sense and the masses, a crucial dimension to his thought. To a limited extent Yitzhak Melamed in his much-noticed article on "Charitable Interpretations" in philosophy rightly stresses that Spinoza had a distinctly low opinion of the masses. However, in Spinoza's schema it is not the masses conceived as an economic or class category—a mistake frequently made—that is at issue but simply the great majority of mankind who fail to base their lives on the guidance of reason whatever class of the population men and women belong to, most decidedly including aristocrats, priests, and royalty, in fact encompassing all those who fail to seek the truth and fail to grasp the reality of things, including even the supposedly sovereign but in most cases isolated, misguided and out-of-touch monarch himself.[7] The path to wisdom is open to everyone and in a society such as Golden Age Holland where the great majority were taught to read it was, after all, a matter of individual choice whether one opted to seek the truth and pursue understanding of reality or not. It may be true, accepting Spinoza's premises, that in his system the "masses should be taught primarily to be obedient," but Melamed, though warmly seconded here by Steenbakkers, Field, and others is fundamentally mistaken in claiming that for Spinoza "insofar as knowledge may impede obedience, it should not be taught to the masses."[8] There is no hint of such stance; this would indeed conflict with his basic position. Rather, Spinoza holds in the *TTP* that it can "not be doubted that the best state accords everyone the same liberty to philosophize as we showed that faith likewise allows" [*TTP* 20 (G III 243/C II 348/SI 254)].[9] Everyone, equally has the same right to freedom of thought and expression. When Spinoza states in *TTP* 20 that "the true purpose of the state is in fact freedom" [(G III 241/C II 346/SI 252)] he clearly intends liberty to include

[7] For critique of Melamed's "Charitable Interpretations" see Israel, "How Does Spinoza's 'Democracy'," 232–5. Given the inaccuracy of Melamed's article, it is quite striking how warmly it has been received; see Steenbakkers, "Beyond the Legends," 22–3; Field, *Potentia*, 152, n. 9.

[8] Melamed, "Charitable Interpretations," 271.

[9] See Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions*, 256.

security, stability, and absence of internecine strife but also an equal freedom for all citizens to seek their happiness under the laws, and develop their minds and bodies, and especially to use their reason freely [*TTP* 20 (G III 243/C II 348/SI 254–5)].[10] Melamed argues that "*Sapere aude* [Dare to Know], the (somewhat pompous) slogan of Kantian Enlightenment is not the advice Spinoza would offer the masses."[11] Melamed, I reply, has confused matters here: in Spinoza, the more citizens who seek the truth the better; it is simply that most people prove incapable of it.

According to the *Ethics*, an emotion (*affectus*) is bad or harmful only "insofar as it prevents the mind from being able to think" (5p9d). Actually here Curley has slightly abbreviated the Latin which reads: "*affectus eatenus tantum malus, seu noxius est, quatenus mens ab eo impeditur, quominus possit cogitare*" (G II 286), or insofar as the mind is "impeded, in how much less it can think." The idea that uncontrolled emotion obstructs the mind, impeding human reason, is of course essential to Spinoza's ethical approach. It is precisely this impeding of reason, and obstruction of the mind, conceived as a limitation on freedom, that underlies Spinoza's rejection of dogma, superstition, and religious authority as constraints on human freedom of a kind that do nothing but detract from individual and collective freedom, and hence from individual and collective 'happiness'. Spinoza reaffirms the link between controlling one's passions, understanding things correctly and human happiness in E5p15 referring to "He who understands himself and his emotions clearly and distinctly loves God, and does so the more, the more he understands himself and his effects." The demonstration here basically just repeats that "he who understands himself and his affects clearly rejoices [*qui se, suosque affectus clare, et distincte intelligit, laetatur*], and this joy is accompanied by the idea of God. Hence, he loves God, and by the same reasoning does so the more, the more he understands himself and his effects" (E5p15d).[12] Of course, God being Nature neither loves nor hates, and neither does he reward or punish, or love men in return—indeed he makes no response whatever to men loving Him so that he who loves God expects no response, nor can he who loves God desire that God should love him in return.

'*Libertas*' is central in Spinoza's thought and yet at the same time, given his necessitarianism, also a seemingly paradoxical dimension. Its most vital usage in Spinoza, plainly, is as in "*libertas philosophica*" *or* "*libertas philosophandi*," where obstructions to clear thought arising from uncontrolled emotion, superstition, dogma, and religious passions are removed and governments and churches prevented from interfering with the process of philosophizing individually and in groups, and precluded from forbidding or censuring opinions, theses, or philosophical publications but also where the individual is encouraged and helped

[10] See James, "Freedom," 228. [11] Melamed, "Charitable Interpretations," 271.
[12] See Giancotti Boscherini, *Lexicon Spinozanum*, II, 650–1.

by those around him or her, not least by teachers, rather than discouraged from developing his own awareness of the reality of things.[13] Here the ethical, intellectual, and political are at every level intimately bound together. But Spinoza's *libertas philosophandi*, being irrevocably tied to removing the mind's emotional obstructions to our thinking, is also closely related to the wider freedom we enjoy when we develop our thinking correctly being a freedom that grows with our understanding. The two together are the source, holds Spinoza, of all stable, lasting and optimal human happiness. How *libertas philosophandi* is possible and what it entails, when freedom of the will and freedom of the mind in Descartes's sense, are not possible, Spinoza seeks to explain in his Letter 21, where he includes an autobiographical passage remarking that the pursuit of truth through philosophy gives him personally enjoyment and constant satisfaction [Ep 21, Spinoza to van Blijenbergh, January 28, 1665 (G IV 127/C I 376)]. Following this personal interjection, Spinoza explicitly rejects Descartes's freedom of the mind, explaining that "our liberty [*libertas*] lies not in a kind of contingency, nor in not knowing whether something is good or bad, but in our way of affirming or denying real things, so that the less indifferently we affirm or deny, the more we are free" [Ep 21, Spinoza to van Blijenbergh, January 28, 1665 (G IV 130/C I 378)].[14] Expounding his compatibilist argument, Spinoza continues:

> If God's nature is known to us asserting God's existence, for instance, follows from our nature with the same necessity as it flows from the nature of a triangle that its three angles are equal to two right angles. Yet, we are never so free as when we affirm something in this way. Because this necessity is in truth nothing other than God's decree, as I have already clearly shown in my Appendix [i.e. the *Cogitata metaphysica*], we may understand after a fashion by what arrangement we do something freely and are the cause of our doing it notwithstanding that we do it necessarily and from God's decree. [Ep 21, Spinoza to van Blijenbergh, January 28, 1665 (G IV 130/ C I 378–9)][15]

4. "Forced to Be Free"

Equally, on this basis, choosing to live under a theocracy, most kinds of monarchy or an aristocratic republic, can never be a 'free' act for anyone whatever they happen to believe: only choosing to live in the democratic republic (or a modified monarchy or aristocracy guided by a broad representative assembly) allowing free expression and devoid of any theological wrangling in its institutional format is an expression of human 'freedom' in Spinoza's sense. It is on this basis, having

[13] See Giancotti Boscherini, *Lexicon Spinozanum*, II, 650; Lærke, *Freedom of Philosophizing*, 2–6.
[14] This is my translation.
[15] This is my translation.

anchored this reconciliation of freedom and necessity, that we can understand Spinoza's guiding principle in the *TTP* and all his political thought that philosophers do not need the republic's laws to enable them to live as free citizens; but the ignorant, superstitious, and ill-intentioned most certainly do require the full force and coercive power of the democratic republic (or monarchies and aristocracies subordinated to representative assemblies) that is the republic dedicated to the well-being of society as a whole, in order to push, in effect coerce, them into being free by deterring them from bad actions and prodding them into acting correctly. In *TTP* 5, Spinoza explains:

> But the real purpose of laws is normally evident only to a few, and since most men are almost incapable of grasping it, and hardly live by reason at all, legislators, in order to constrain all men equally, have wisely contrived another end, very different from the one which necessarily follows from the nature of laws: they promise those who keep the laws things that the common people most desire, and they threaten those who violate them with what they most fear. In this way they have tried, to restrain the common people like a horse with a bridle, as far as they could. [*TTP* 5 (G III 59/C II 127/SI 58)]

Spinoza is here clearly construing religious laws generally as just dressed-up civil laws while at the same time designating the public or civil religion adopted by the state which he proposes as likewise a purely political device inculcating obedience to his "universal faith," a form of "religion" without basic truth content even though most people imagine the contrary, supposing that it is revealed by God.[16]

5. Abolishing Religious Authority

Melamed, in his article "Charitable Interpretations," contends that what Spinoza proposes can hardly be described as "separation of church and state."[17] But this is to the miss the point: what is revolutionary and entirely 'modern' in Spinoza's approach to church-state relations is not literal separation of church and state but rather the wholesale rejection of religious authority and the stripping out of all theology from the moral order, legal system, and institutions of the state, even Spinoza's "civil religion" constituting no more than a schoolroom prop for the unknowing, essentially just a non-theological stage parading a minimal "religion" of justice and charity. It is in his unbending subordination of churchmen to the state in every conceivable way, going far beyond anything suggested by the bold Erastianism of Grotius who certainly wanted as few core theological dogmas as

[16] Lærke, "National Religion," 118–19; Garber, "Religion and the Civil State," 131, 133–4.
[17] Melamed, "Charitable Interpretations," 269.

possible to be retained but still insisted on those few core theological dogmas, revolving around redemption through Christ, that constitutes an unprecedented departure from medieval church-state relations and renders Spinoza a true precursor and icon of modern secularism. Public procedures once associated with the priesthood, especially making pronouncements and judgments about core moral values, and presiding over public ceremonies, marriages and so forth, may be transferred from the clergy to the members of the government under this new scenario but never the power to create theological dogmas and shape men's beliefs, or to establish an ecclesiastical court separate from the judicial power of the state. Understood as an attack on the autonomous power of churchmen and complete suspension of Christian and all theology which is what it is, Spinoza's political thought does involve a complete separation of church and state as traditionally understood. In fact, the separate ecclesiastical sphere is wholly detached, dismantled, and dissolved and theology with it.[18]

Here, one does indeed encounter striking affinities in how both Spinoza and Rousseau, in contrast to Hobbes, vest sovereignty not in a person or an assembly, and still less in the expressed wishes of the people, but in the requirements of society as a whole, and, as consequence, envisage society's 'common good' as a moral *persona* and a coercive force. This is a major new departure in the history of political thought—though in the seventeenth-century Dutch context it is not Spinoza who initiates it. As Walter Eckstein already pointed out more than seventy years ago, "there are affinities in the political ideas of Spinoza and Rousseau and even almost literal coincidences in the expression of those ideas which can hardly be considered accidental."[19] Paul Vernière said something similar, as did Maria José Villaverde subsequently.[20] Like Rousseau who first became acquainted with Spinoza's writings under Diderot's influence in the late 1740s,[21] Spinoza buttresses his 'common good' which is simultaneously a moral and political construct via a commonly shared civil or public 'religion' devoid of all theological dogma; however—very much unlike Rousseau—Spinoza characterizes his 'common good' not as the expressed will of a particular society but rather the common good of society as opposed to that of the ruler, that of elites, and that of the theologians, prioritizing the central moral values of justice, equity, and charity and giving these organizational form.[22]

6. The 'General Will'

Spinoza is no more inclined than Hobbes to detect any sort of pre-political collective will or equality in the multitude. He is just as convinced as Hobbes that

[18] Garber, "Religion and the Civil State," 142–4.
[19] Eckstein, "Rousseau and Spinoza," 270.
[20] Vernière, *La pensée française*, 482–3, 486; Villaverde, "Rousseau," 107–39.
[21] See Villaverde, "Rousseau," 118.
[22] See James, "Freedom," 229.

left to themselves the multitude is entirely disruptive and at once descends into warring factions and destructive splits, with informal groups under leaders pressuring others and learning to create organs or agencies of the state to form a de facto oligarchic structure ruthlessly taking advantage of the weak, subordinate and unaware in their own interest. Pure republics based on the expressed "will of the people" are just as apt to be oppressive, and exploitative in the interests of small dominant cliques as non-representative monarchies and aristocracies, even if much less likely to be stable and enduring in their oppressiveness than the Ottoman Empire, for example, Spinoza's favorite instance of a highly stable and enduring but oppressive and undesirable state. As Field correctly stresses, confusing stability and durability with states genuinely serving the collective good of society has been one of the most notable mistakes clouding recent discussions of Spinoza's political thought. Stability and durability are certainly desirable qualities in the optimal form of state, but experience shows, Spinoza emphasizes, that actual stability and durability have nothing at all to do with correctly establishing a state serving the common good of society.[23]

To understand Spinoza's political thought correctly it is essential to grasp that in the *TP* he is not trying to identify the best type of state—monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy—in a theoretical sense but, rather, accepting that all states in his time were either monarchies or aristocracies, demonstrate from history and contemporary circumstances, that is experience, what the best outcomes in all three cases are.[24] All three categories can be stable, durable, and oppressive, all three can be unstable, disruptive, and short-lived. The only desirable states, whether monarchies, oligarchies, or democracies, are those guided by broadly representative assemblies groping their way toward what is best for society overall on the basis of experience and reason. It should be added that both the *TTP* and *TP* are deeply enmeshed in the specific circumstances of Dutch and European politics in the 1660s and 1670s and one of the most important reasons why a good deal of serious inaccuracy has dogged recent discussions of Spinoza's political thought is that most of the debate simply does not discuss or reflect the contemporary political reality Spinoza was wrestling with.

How, then, in a given particular context, is the collective good of society to be sought and attained? In his recent essay "Spinoza and the General Will," David Lay Williams observes that "Spinoza is never cited as part of the general will tradition."[25] This is not altogether the case since Eckstein, Vernière, Villaverde, and latterly I myself, have repeatedly stressed that Spinoza, contrary to the conventional view, *is* in fact the chief source of Europe's mainstream secular, anti-theological 'general will' tradition. Williams also suggests that Spinoza's usage of the concept was essentially a deviation from what he calls "the dominant Platonic

[23] Field, *Potentia*, 79–80, 84–6; Sharp, "Family Quarrels," 99; Israel, "How Does Spinoza's Democracy," 228–32.

[24] Lavaert, *Vrijheid, gelijkheid*, 219, 243.

[25] Williams, "General Will," 116.

version."[26] This too is questionable. For there *is* no dominant Platonic version. By the mid- and later eighteenth century far from there being any dominant "Platonic version," what dominates in European political thought is the 'general will' as expounded by radical enlighteners like Diderot, the early Rousseau, d'Holbach, Helvétius, Condorcet, and Volney; and in this presiding radical Enlightenment 'general will' tradition it is always materialist—even in the pre-1756 Rousseau—and unbendingly anti-Platonic in approach. For the altogether marginal Platonist 'general will' tradition, as represented by Malebranche for example, politics is a device working in the service of religious authority, a line of thought where theology ultimately prevails over all other knowledge; the dominant 'general will' tradition starts with Spinoza and encompasses Diderot, the early Rousseau, and Condorcet and pivots on theology being stripped away and what is called 'civil religion' put to work purely in the service of society and the state.

Against Eckstein's view that Rousseau's direct borrowing from Spinoza is evident, Williams suggests that there is "insufficient evidence for a claim this strong" though he does grant that "it is also clear that there is some undeniable affinity."[27] Williams also remarks: "to be sure, the general will does not dominate Spinoza's political thought as Rousseau's would dominate his."[28] This conclusion too is in need of correction: for, on the contrary, the 'general will' is as dominant and central in Spinoza's political theory as it is in Rousseau as was fully recognized as long ago as 1987 by Maria José Villaverde.[29] Nevertheless, despite his string of cautious minimizing qualifications, Williams himself admits that "careful examination of Spinoza's work reveals [the general will] to play a significant role."[30]

Where Williams article is helpful is in affirming the *TTP* is in many respects a rejoinder to the confessional and political strains threatening to tear the Dutch Republic apart during its Golden Age, and did in fact tear Johan de Witt and the 'True Freedom' apart in 1672, arguing that any authentic reading of Scripture far from supporting any of the warring confessions—Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran, Remonstrant, and Mennonite, and that of Spinoza's own friends, the Collegiants—supplies only the principles of the 'universal faith', the essentials of Spinoza's civil religion, a faith devoid of dogmas, consisting only in the ethical principles of justice and charity.[31] Where Hobbes's citizens obey the laws out of fear alone, and their need for security, Spinoza's citizens, like Rousseau's later, optimally fulfill their obligations out of a theology-free sense of moral and 'religious' commitment and a desire to further the common cause as well as their own individual happiness. Consequently, the 'common good', states Spinoza (who had personally experienced the complexity of court proceedings to a greater extent than most political thinkers), far better buttresses the taking of oaths in court and council

[26] Williams, "General Will," 115.
[27] Williams, "General Will," 130.
[28] Williams, "General Will," 115.
[29] See Villaverde, *Las luces*, 226.
[30] Williams, "General Will," 115.
[31] Williams, "General Will," 131.

than any theological construct. Those obliged to swear before magistrates or representative bodies:

> …will be much more careful to avoid perjury if they are commanded to swear by their country's well-being and liberty [*libertas*], and by its supreme Council, than if required to swear by God. He who swears by God introduces a private good the character of which he evaluates himself; but he who pledges the liberty and well-being of his country swears by the common good of all [*per commune omnium bonum*], the lines of which he [the individual citizen] does not determine. If he perjures himself, he thereby declares himself the enemy of his country. [*TP* 8.48 (G III 346/C II 588)][32]

The paradox that the great majority of men must be forced to be free has often been scorned as a ridiculous notion in political thought by commentators and is usually associated with Rousseau rather than Spinoza.[33] Nevertheless, there can be no question that Rousseau derived this principle, as he derived much else, directly from Spinoza, even though it actually makes less sense in the context of Rousseau's thought where men are naturally good and have no need to learn anything from philosophy or experience to demonstrate their virtue than in Spinoza where those lacking learning and understanding have hardly any means to lead them to a virtuous, happy, and stable life and must be helped—that is, goaded—into doing so by a state and a morally orientated, civil religion devoid of dogma and priestly authority. And while the coercive power of the state cannot altogether "*mentem a praejudiciis theologicis liberare* [free our minds from theological prejudices]" [*TTP* 7 (G III 98/C II 171/SI 98)], it can certainly minimize the colossal damage these universally cause.

Such constraint is always necessary and of the utmost importance to everyone, not just for the happiness of those subject to 'superstition', and the fears and hopes on which it thrives, but because, as Spinoza explains in the Preface to the *TTP* (G III 6/C II 67/SI 4–5), 'superstition' always menaces all men, being the chief basis of tyranny, oppression, wars, instability, persecution, and intolerance. The institutions of the democratic republic have a negative, coercive aspect in Spinoza but, even more importantly, have a positive, enriching, and emancipating aspect. It is clear in the *TTP* that the aim of society "and every state" is not just to enable men to live securely, as in Hobbes, but also "satisfyingly" providing scope for every individual to develop his or her potential to the utmost [*TTP* 3 (G III 48/C II 115/SI 47)]. The "foundations and end" of Spinoza's democratic republic are "to avoid the follies of appetite and as much as possible to bring men within the limits of reason, so that they may dwell in peace and harmony"

[32] See Giancotti Boscherini, *Lexicon Spinozanum*, I, 116.
[33] See Vernière, *La pensée française*, 484; McShea, *Political Philosophy*, 64.

[*TTP* 16 (G III 194/SI 201/C II 288)]. Thus, Spinoza's democratic republic has a double role and the moral order that underpins its institutions needs to project both the rules regulating coercion of the ignorant and superstitious who have to be forced to be free but also follow moral and political guidelines laid down by 'philosophy' designed to promote individual liberty, happiness, and emotional stability. The two together form Spinoza's 'common good' which is essentially the "*algemeene accorderende interest* [general agreeing interest]," "'*t Gemeene-beste*," and "*even-gelijke vrijheid* [evenly equal freedom]" spelled out by his older associate and Latin teacher Franciscus Van den Enden, in his *Vrije politieke stellingen* (1665), that is the general interest, or 'general will' as Diderot, d'Holbach, and Rousseau renamed it in the 1750s, the most anti-Hobbesian strand of all the many anti-Hobbesian strands in Spinozism.[34] It is the general interest in what best supports the individual pursuit of worldly happiness, when all theology and Revelation is stripped systematically away, and the common best is directed by popular sovereignty, the collective power of all citizens within a society when their individual interests are treated as equal irrespective of whether it is formally a monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy.

Rousseau, in borrowing his concept of 'general will' directly from Diderot, and more distantly, from Spinoza, borrowed also the idea that "whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the entire body: which means nothing other than that he shall be forced to be free."[35] One might object that Spinoza, unlike Diderot and Rousseau, introduces no new specific technical term for the 'general will'. The wording, or expressions, Spinoza uses to refer to the collective principle setting the guiding rules by which the ignorant and superstitious, those who find nothing in the highest good that philosophy delivers that they can touch or eat, those who need to be constrained to follow the common good via the laws, do sound thoroughly unoriginal. But if the terminology is commonplace, Spinoza's 'common good', despite being something most men are incapable of grasping, is always of the greatest importance through both its negative and positive aspects for everyone in society. In the *TTP*, Spinoza seems to have no specific term or expression for the concept. His more obviously innovative usage of the expression "common good" appears only later in the *Tractatus politicus*. When Spinoza explains the difference between 'slavery' and political liberty in chapter 16 of the *TTP* he simply says that "in a state and government where the *salus* of the whole people, not that of the supreme ruler, is the supreme law [*ubi salus totius populi, non imperantis, summa lex est*]" one is living in freedom [*TTP* 16 (G III 194–5/C II 288–9/SI 201)]. Michael Silverthorne and I here

[34] Van den Enden, *Vrije politijke stellingen*, 140, 146–9, 156, 160, 178–9; Lavaert, *Vrijheid, gelijkheid*, 293–4.

[35] Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 53. See Villaverde, *Las luces*, 226; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 77–80; Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, 636–41; Israel, *Enlightenment That Failed*, 290–317.

translated '*salus*' as 'safety'; but on reflection we were mistaken here; for this rendering hardly makes proper sense in this context. Spinoza's '*salus*' needs, rather, to be understood as meaning 'well-being', 'prosperity', and 'vigor', or better still, the 'common good'.[36] When Spinoza discusses the need to subordinate religious worship and pious conduct to the "peace and interests of the state" at the start of *TTP* 19 [(G III 229/C II 333/SI 238)] he calls this "*reipublicae paci et utilitati accommodari*." Michael Silverthorne and I did use the expression the "common good" when rendering the last page of the *TTP* where Spinoza sums up and asserts that "issuing decrees about doctrinal issues is completely useless" [*TTP* 20 (G III 246/C II 353//SI 258)] and that liberty of saying what one thinks can not only be conceded without harming the peace of the republic but that such freedom is essential to it. Efforts to strip men of freedom of expression, contends Spinoza, is utterly destructive of the well-being of the republic and the wording he uses here is once again "*Republicae salus*" [*TTP* 20 (G III 247/C II 353/SI 259)].[37]

7. Democracy the Best Form of State

The idea that perfecting our intellect is the path to "*summum nostrum bonum*" meanwhile, is pivotal in the *TTP* as in the *Ethics*. But it is at least partly because most individuals as a rule avoid "*summum nostrum bonum*" and pursue their own interests rather than the 'common good', that democracy is in principle better than aristocracy; for the wider forum for discussion that democracy offers is the form mostly likely to expose the machinations of those in charge when these are against the common interest. Equally, in the case of aristocratic republics, such as Spinoza's own native and highly oligarchic Dutch Republic, the broader the oligarchy, the more power is shared and decision-making requires consultation and discussion, the better 'the common good' is served. This decidedly remains the case also in Spinoza's later text, the *Tractatus politicus*. This is what for him rendered the Venetian Republic inferior to that of the Dutch. Thus, small councils—as also in Van den Enden[38]—must be prevented from gaining in power at the expense of great councils as had unfortunately occurred at Venice and Geneva and, members of the senates or legislative assemblies should be replaced with new representatives frequently. Dispersing power, spreading consultation, debate, and participation more broadly remain always vital to the functioning of Spinoza's sovereignty because only such consultative spread can guarantee the curbing of private interest and that the "common good is consulted

[36] See James, "Freedom," 229.
[37] See Giancotti Boscherini, *Lexicon Spinozanum*, I, 114–15, and II, 974.
[38] Lavaert, *Vrijheid, gelijkheid*, 296.

[*ut communi bono consulatur*]" [*TP* 8.11 (G III 329/C II 569–70)].[39] Wherever excessive power to decide, or effective sovereignty, becomes concentrated in one person whether in a monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy it is highly detrimental to the common good. The chief menace to the "True Freedom" of 1650–72 of the Dutch regents in the time of De Witt was the possible return of the institution of the stadholderate vested in the House of Orange, an institution suspended in the province of Holland since 1650, but which many or most people wanted restored. Spinoza, by contrast, judged it a harmful monarchical anomaly, an obsolete vestige from the past contradicting the basic principles of the state that ought never have outlasted the early stages of the Dutch Revolt (*TP* 126, 72).[40]

Far from giving up on political philosophy after 1672, or resorting to a political philosophy steeped in "profound ambiguity," as Verbeek suggests,[41] Spinoza emphatically concludes that spreading power broadly is always and everywhere essential above all so that the "common good is attended to [*ut communi bono consulatur*]" [*TP* 8.11 (G III 329/C II 569)].[42] As Spinoza puts it in *TP* 9.14: "On the other hand, when the few decide everything, simply on the basis of their own inclinations, both freedom [*libertas*] and the common good [*communeque bonum*] are lost" [*TP* 9.4 (G III 353/C II 594)].[43] Melamed and Verbeek are thus once again confusing matters when claiming Spinoza "prefers both democracy and aristocracy to monarchy, though it is not at all clear what his preference is between democracy and aristocracy."[44] That is entirely incorrect. In the *TTP* and the *TP*, Spinoza consistently expresses his preference for democracy to both monarchy *and* aristocracy, a preference inherent in his conception of the 'common good.'[45] In the *TTP* the democratic republic is declared superior to monarchies and aristocratic republics partly because there "all remain equal as they had been previously, in the state of nature" [*TTP* 16 (G III 195/SI 202/C II 289)], partly because it affords more liberty to all than the other two forms, and most crucially of all because it best promotes the 'common good'. Melamed is mistaken further when he says "Spinoza's main motivation for supporting democracy relies on the rather naïve form of realpolitik which assumes that a large group of people with a vast variety of conflicting desires is unlikely to agree on extremely irrational policies."[46] Although the idea that the inevitable disagreements and conflicts within society can be filtered, stabilized, and contained by discussion exposing

[39] See also *TP* 8.1–3 (G III 323–5/C II 564–6); *TP* 8.12–15 (G III 329–30/C II 570–1); *TP* 8.44 (G III 344/C II 585); *TP* 9.14 (G III 352/C II 595). See also Giancotti Boscherini, *Lexicon Spinozanum*, I, 116.

[40] Moreau, "A-t-on raison de se révolter?," 28.

[41] Verbeek, "Aristocratic and Democratic Government," 159–60.

[42] My translation. See Giancotti Boscherini, *Lexicon Spinozanum*, I, 116.

[43] See Giancotti Boscherini, *Lexicon Spinozanum*, I, 116.

[44] Melamed, "Charitable Interpretations," 271; Verbeek, "Aristocratic and Democratic Government," 156–60.

[45] See Vernière, *La pensée française*, 485; Israel, "Introduction," xxx.

[46] Melamed, "Charitable Interpretations," 271–2.

one another's mistakes and prejudices so as to conduce to peaceful and constructive resolutions, is indeed basic to Spinoza's approach, this is only one reason Spinoza offers as to why big councils representing a wider spread of opinion are preferable to small ones.[47] The prime reason offered in the *TP* where the stress on democracy's superiority is admittedly toned down compared with the *TTP*, yet far from absent, is that private vested interests that prey on the majority can more easily conceal their machinations in small councils. It is countering this tendency as well as sifting the inevitable conflict of desires in big councils that gives reason more scope to influence the final outcome and promote the 'common good', a general principle applying to monarchies willing to be guided by representative assemblies as well as aristocracies and democracies.[48]

8. Spinoza and Radical Enlightenment 'Modernity'

Finally, it seems relevant to consider the comparisons involved here between Spinoza and Hobbes, and Spinoza and Rousseau, also with respect to the question of 'modernity', by which I mean the radical Enlightenment's democratic republican "universal and equal rights" modernity.[49] Supporting Melamed, Steenbakkers terms my linking Spinoza to 'modernity' in this context "an utterly ambiguous notion";[50] but radical Enlightenment 'modernity', culminating in Condorcet, I reply, is not at all vague or ambiguous but rather, as a detailed attention to the sources shows, highly specific.[51] Hobbes with his Leviathan state and in-built monarchism, as well as lack of safeguards against ecclesiastical authority and censorship, cannot be an inspiration for a post-metaphysical modern seeking to escape religious authority and kings and queens. Equally, Rousseau with his rejection of representative democracy and lack of safeguards for dissenting

[47] Sharp, "Family Quarrels," 109; Del Lucchese, "Revolutionary Foundation," 202–3.
[48] Sharp, "Family Quarrels," 93, 105–10; and see again notes 33 and 34 above.
[49] Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*. [50] Steenbakkers, "Beyond the Legends," 20–3.
[51] In his article, "Beyond the Legends," Piet Steenbakkers argues that "even if we accept this idiosyncratic and optimistic assessment of modernity as a package of values," meaning my description of the radical Enlightenment as the marrying of democratic republicanism to rejection of religious authority which, far from "idiosyncratic" is fundamental to the entire *cercle spinoziste*, "it is not obvious that Spinoza can be considered its source, origin or originator. I cannot go into the many aspects of his thought that do not fit this radiant picture. Yitzhak Melamed has published some valuable reflections on this topic. One particularly problematic issue that I add here is Spinoza's defense of genocide as a legitimate weapon in war." This passage is notably inaccurate. I do *not* argue that Spinoza was the "source, origin, or originator" of the radical Enlightenment's 'modernity' package but rather that the '*cercle spinoziste*' was—which is something significantly different. Melamed's reflections on Spinoza's contribution to the radical Enlightenment hardly rate as 'valuable reflections' as most are demonstrably incorrect. When Spinoza refers to cities being "completely destroyed" in *TP* 6.35 (G III 306/C II 542), and *TP* 9.1 (G III 346/C II 588–9), it is far from clear that he meant that the inhabitants be destroyed together with their cities; certainly, the contemporary Dutch translator for the *Nagelate Schriften* assumed it was the cities and their fortifications, not the inhabitants, that Spinoza had in mind.

minorities cannot be any kind of inspiration for proponents of democratic modernity—as the disastrous ideological politics and *Robespierrisme* of the French Revolution confirmed. Both Hobbes and Rousseau stand as largely negative when viewed as feasible roads to democratic republican modernity.

It is worth reminding the reader that my series of *Radical Enlightenment* volumes make no claim to Spinoza's philosophy being "the origin of modernity." The argument is, rather, that the Dutch Republic, rather than England or France, insofar as it was the first urbanized, non-aristocratic, non-monarchical, and non-ecclesiastical society, became the first 'modern' society in fundamental respects, especially as regards encouraging broad discussion of politics and relative freedom of expression and the press. Several writers, most notably the brothers De La Court, Adriaan Koerbagh, and Van den Enden built on this. But Spinoza was the foremost of this crucial group who together laid the foundations of the radical Enlightenment.[52] This means that he has a central claim to having helping forge the frame of representative democratic modernity, giving him a title with respect to 'modernity' that goes substantially beyond the claims of Machiavelli, Grotius, Hobbes, and Rousseau. Steenbakkers maintains that my account "does not rest on a detailed analysis of [Spinoza's] works but instead on the imputations of those who saw the enlightenment as a disaster." I have no idea how he came to this astonishing conclusion but suffice it to say that it is extremely remote from my own view. No account of Spinoza's role has any value unless it does rest on detailed analysis of his works—and not just that, I would add, but research into his life and circle. As for the views of the *anti-philosophes*, these serve only to illustrate how deeply Spinoza's challenge shook the eighteenth century, and nothing more.

Spinoza was definitely not the "source, origin, or originator" of the radical Enlightenment's 'modernity' package; nor have I ever suggested he was. What is argued in the series of volumes, as here, is that radical thought in the later Dutch Golden Age was the original source of democratic republicanism and the "general will" approach to sovereignty for a factual and very concrete historical reason: during the later seventeenth century, the Dutch scene more visibly and powerfully pitted aristocratic republicanism against democratic republicanism on the then political scene than any comparable scenarios in Italy, Switzerland, or England. The plain historical fact is that the seventeenth-century Dutch political context more powerfully reflected and formulated the opposition of democratic republican impulses and theories to aristocratic republicanism than did any Italian or English republican theorists. The deep relevance of this to modern Western "modernity" is neither vague nor something to pass over lightly.

[52] Israel, "Game-Changing Concept," 37–9; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 12–13, 159–96; Israel, *Enlightenment That Failed*, 930–42.

However, in terms of political thought more narrowly considered, it was the collectivity of the wider *cercle spinoziste* that accomplished this historic feat of analysis and theorizing, and not Spinoza alone; and although Spinoza was the only great philosopher among the group, the one who formulated their conclusions and principles most enduringly and incisively, he was by no means the first to do so, being definitely preceded both as regards the superiority of democratic republicanism to aristocratic republicanism, and the need to reject religious authority comprehensively, by Van den Enden and Koerbagh, as well as the brothers De la Court.

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